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*On the Ancient Uses of Political Fear and its Modern Implications*¹

Daniel Kapust

I. POLITICAL FEAR AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

Political fear has attracted much attention from political theorists, philosophers, and scientists in recent years.² Anne Norton, for instance, notes that “Soccer moms on the radio, policy makers on television tell us that nothing is the same since 9/11. We live in fear, they say.”³ Haynes Johnson argues that such fear is an essential feature of recent American political culture, with its origins in the Red Scare of the early 1950s.⁴ Frank Furedi suggests that it is not distinctively American, but rather distinctively contemporary, rooted in “the impoverishment of the language of public life.”⁵ Furedi argues that “the absence of political purpose and clarity about the future” in

¹ I would like to thank Corey Robin, Eric MacGilvray, Victoria Pagan, Keith Dougherty, Jamie Carson, Thomas Conte, and Jeffrey Church for helpful comments on this article. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Midwest Political Science Association’s 2006 meeting.

² See, e.g., David L. Altheide, *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002); Benjamin Barber, *Fear’s Empire: War, Terrorism, and Democracy* (New York: Norton, 2003); Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005).

³ Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 156.

⁴ See Haynes Johnson, *The Age of Anxiety: McCarthyism to Terrorism* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005); esp. 459–93.

⁵ Frank Furedi, *Politics of Fear* (London: Continuum, 2005), 8.

contemporary politics gives rise to a “politics of fear,” within which politicians utilize fear to achieve their ends.⁶

Other scholars trace fear’s prevalence to deeper origins, arguing that modern political thought can be distinguished from pre-modern political thought partly by reference to the role of fear. Fear takes on greater importance in modern political thought due to its shift in focus from classical political thought, which featured an aspiration to virtue. Thus Leo Strauss argued that modern political thought, beginning with Machiavelli, rejected the classical pursuit of virtue “as unrealistic.”⁷ The foundation of Machiavelli’s (and Hobbes’s) new politics was fear, not virtue; as Strauss argues of Machiavelli’s *Discourses*, “men were good at the beginning not because of innocence but because they were gripped by terror and fear.”⁸ For Strauss, that “fear-inspired peacefulness” was the basis of Hobbes’s political theory is due to Machiavelli’s influence.⁹ Judith Shklar argued that at the foundation of one mode of early modern liberal thought—the liberalism of fear—was a *summum malum*: “cruelty and the fear it inspires, and the very fear of fear itself.”¹⁰ The liberalism of fear did not tell “the citizenry to pursue happiness or even to define that wholly elusive condition”; it was explicitly anti-heroic, and as such “it offends those who identify politics with mankind’s most noble aspirations.”¹¹ Corey Robin also argues that fear plays a foundational role in much liberal political thought. Early modern liberals saw the self as an entity that could “orchestrate his morals and politics” and fashion “his own identity”; the world inhabited by such selves seemed “an inherently insecure and precarious place.”¹² Fear thus provided stability and security for theorists such as Hobbes, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville, according to Robin, yielding both moral energy and political unity.

If modern liberal thought is rooted in weak foundations and buttressed by fear, not all observers find this comforting. Robin, for instance, argues that “fear is not, and cannot, be a foundation of moral and political argu-

⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁷ Leo Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?” in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, ed. Hilail Gilden (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 39.

⁸ Leo Strauss, “Niccolò Machiavelli,” in *History of Political Philosophy*, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 310.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy Rosenblum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31, 32.

¹² Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11, 12.

ment.”¹³ For Robin, relying on fear has done little to ameliorate the dilemmas of American politics and has undermined the liberating aspirations of liberalism. Norton suggests that for those who find themselves in the grip of political fear, “[t]he measures they take to protect themselves place their lives, their liberties, and their honor in danger.”¹⁴ Indeed, the prevalence of fear may hinder democratic politics itself: Mark Landau et al. conclude, based on their study of fear’s effects on the appeal of leaders, that “political allegiances are not always based on the balanced, rational forces of self-interest suggested by the Jeffersonian notion of democracy but also on the operation of nonrational forces of which we are not always aware.”¹⁵

Displeasing as this finding and the salience of fear in modern politics may be, neither would have surprised many ancient thinkers. Rather, Landau et al.’s findings are strikingly reminiscent of what Cicero has Antonius say in *On the Orator*: “men decide far more problems by hate, or love, or lust, or rage, or sorrow, or joy, or hope, or fear, or illusion, or some other inward emotion, than by reality, or authority, or any legal standard, or judicial precedent, or statute.”¹⁶ Though the passage comes from a rhetorical writing, we find fear to be understood in similar ways in philosophical and historical writings as well. Indeed, I show that fear played an important role in ancient political thought, a role that has been neglected in studies delineating modern from pre-modern thought and exploring the relationship between fear and modern politics. In doing so, I discuss how fear, especially of foreigners, was understood to provide the political goods of moral energy and political unity.¹⁷ While fear could be invigorating and unifying, I also discuss fear’s enervating role, especially in the writings of Tacitus. By drawing attention to the multiple uses of fear in classical political thought, I not only draw attention to an important theme, but also provide a comparative historical resource for contemporary discussions of fear’s role in political thought. Finally, by surveying fear’s positive and negative uses, sources, and political consequences, I show that a key concern for scholars of political fear should be isolating its particular uses.¹⁸

¹³ Ibid., 251.

¹⁴ Norton, *Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*, 159.

¹⁵ Mark J. Landau, Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, Florette Cohen, Tom Pyszczynski, Jamie Arndt, Claude H. Miller, Daniel M. Ogilvie, and Alison Cook, “Deliver Us From Evil: The Effects of Mortality Salience and Reminders of 9/11 on Support for President George W. Bush,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 30 (2004): 1136–50, 1146.

¹⁶ Cicero, *De Oratore*, trans. E. W. Sutton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 2.178.

¹⁷ In isolating these roles, I draw on Robin, *Fear*, 1–16.

¹⁸ My approach derives from Skinner’s argument that “there can be no histories of concepts as such; there can only be histories of their uses in argument.” Quentin Skinner, “A

II. FEAR AND PERSUASION IN ANCIENT THOUGHT

That fear played a major role in ancient political thought is unsurprising; however, its role seems largely negative given the importance of courage. Courage, particularly courage in battle, was highly praised in the Greek world and in Rome.¹⁹ So important was courage in Sparta, for instance, that cowards were required to shave half of their beards and wear distinctive clothing, the better to make examples of them.²⁰ Martial valor enjoyed high status in Rome as well, evident in the historian Appian's description of a Senatorial debate over whether Roman prisoners ought to be ransomed during Rome's war with Hannibal. Despite the pressure of the prisoners' relatives, the Senate refused the ransom, in part because some Senators "thought that it was not fitting to accustom men to flight by such compassion, but rather to teach them to conquer or die in the field, knowing that even the fugitive's own friends would not be allowed to pity him."²¹

Cowardice was stigmatized, while courage was to be praised and cultivated. This can be seen in philosophical writings as well: for Plato, courage was a cardinal virtue and the product of careful education in his *Republic*. Because free men were "to fear slavery more than death," the stories they were to be told ought to cultivate the proper fears, given the impact of stories on early psychological development.²² For Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, courage is a virtue of character and, like other such virtues, arises in part from habituation through the performance of like actions.²³ Aristotle's brave person in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is he who "stands firm

Reply to My Critics," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 283.

¹⁹ See Kenneth Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 161–70; Catharine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 77–78; William V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome: 327–70 B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 18–26.

²⁰ Plutarch, *Life of Agesilaus*, in *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (London: William Heinemann, 1914), 5: 30.2–3.

²¹ Appian, *Roman History*, trans. Horace White (London: William Heinemann, 1928), 1: 7.5.28.

²² Plato, *Republic*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 387b3–4. On psychological development, cf. 376e9–377c5. Cf. C. C. W. Taylor, "Platonic Ethics," in *Ethics*, ed. Steven Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 66–68.

²³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 2.4.1105b6–18. On intellectual virtues and virtues of character, see John McDowell, "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology," in *Ethics*, ed. Steven Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 119–21.

against the right things and fears the right things, for the right end in the right way, at the right time, and is correspondingly confident.”²⁴ For Stoics, fear was, like other emotions, an example of “perverse opinions and judgments,” the result of “inclinations and yieldings, assents and impulses of the whole directive faculty.”²⁵ Fear was to be managed rationally, lest it run out of control.²⁶

Despite these cautious attitudes towards fear in individuals, fear might have positive effects, especially when dealing with groups. This is clearly evident in classical rhetorical writings, whose authors believed that effective orators might need to evoke fear in their audiences and that fear was a useful persuasive device.²⁷ For example Aristotle writes in the *Rhetoric* that fear can be aroused in the skillful orator’s listeners by making “them feel that they really are in danger of something.”²⁸ The prospect of some future evil was a powerful persuasive tool, planting in one’s audience a potent stimulus for action. Cicero, in his rhetorical treatise *On the Ideal Orator*, makes a similar argument concerning the evocation of emotions by speakers. Successful persuasion relies on the use of three elements: evidence, a well-disposed audience, “and the rousing of their feelings to whatever impulse our case may require.”²⁹ Cicero argues that the arousal of emotions in general, including fear, is an important part of oratory, as it helps advocates “that the members of the tribunal, of their own accord, should carry within them to Court some mental emotion that is in harmony with what the advocate’s interest will suggest.”³⁰ In his dialogue on the history of oratory, *Brutus*, Cicero goes so far as to argue “that of all the resources of an orator far the greatest is his ability to inflame the minds of his hearers and to turn them in whatever direction the case demands.”³¹ Such appeals were

²⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3.7.1115b17–18.

²⁵ Plutarch, *On Moral Virtue*, in *Plutarch’s Moralia*, trans. W. C. Helmbold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), 6: 446f–447a.

²⁶ Cf. Brad Inwood and Pierluigi Donini, “Stoic Ethics,” in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. Keimpe Algra, Jonathan Barnes, Jaap Mansfield, and Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 701–3. On “unbridled impulses,” see Seneca, *On Anger*, in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays*, trans. John M. Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.10.1–3.

²⁷ See Gary Remer, “Political Oratory and Conversation: Cicero Versus Deliberative Democracy,” *Political Theory* 27 (1999): 36–64.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2: 2.5.1383a8.

²⁹ Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2.115.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.186.

³¹ Cicero, *Brutus*, trans. G. L. Hendrickson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952), 80.279. Cf. Cicero, *De Oratore*, 1.17.

especially useful in speaking to popular audiences; Quintilian explicitly states that when speaking before audiences “who, if not thoroughly ill-educated, are certainly ignorant of such arts as dialectic,” a speaker might require “an appeal to their emotions,” lest he “be unable to vindicate the claims of truth and justice.”³² Indeed, such emotional appeals serve in part to distinguish popularly-oriented rhetoric from dialectic or conversation.³³ Thus, fear along with other requisite emotions was to be aroused by orators in their speeches to achieve their purposes.

When we turn from rhetorical treatises to a well-known example of Ciceronian oratory, we see that Cicero deployed fear in his speech *On the Agrarian Law* to achieve his ends in speaking before a popular audience. Cicero argued that Rullus’s land bill would rob the Roman people of land and liberty, a prospect made more frightening by its source: its champion was a tribune, “a magistrate whom our ancestors intended to be the protector and guardian of liberty.” Despite the intent of Rome’s ancestors that the tribunes safeguard liberty, this law would instead “set up kings in the republic.”³⁴ The irony of Cicero’s argument is clear: a man who normally claimed to be an *optimatus* now claimed to be the true *popularis*, yet his *popularitas* was manifest in his opposition to a land reform bill.³⁵ Thus he tells Rullus, who had proposed the land law, “You made a great mistake . . . in hoping that, by opposing a consul who was popular in reality not in pretence, you could be considered popular in overthrowing the republic.”³⁶ According to Cicero, the people want peace, harmony, and quiet, and he employs the fearful prospect of lost liberty to sway them to his view of Rullus’s law.

III. FEAR, UNITY, AND MORAL ENERGY IN PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The persuasive use of fear is not isolated to rhetorical treatises and oratory. Fear also possesses a persuasive function for both Plato and Aristotle, for

³² Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 2: 5.14.29. See also Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2.10.35.

³³ On emotions and popular audiences, see Remer, “Political Oratory and Conversation,” 45–49.

³⁴ Cicero, *De Lege Agraria*, in *Cicero: Pro Publio Quinctio, Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino, Pro Quinto Roscio Comoedo, De Lege Agraria*, trans. John Henry Freese (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 2.6. See also Robert Morstein-Marx, *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 195.

³⁵ On the terms *optimatus* and *popularis*, see Cicero, *Pro Sestio*, in *Pro Sestio and in Vatinius*, trans. R. Gardner (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 45–48.

³⁶ Cicero, *De Lege Agraria*, 1.23.

whom fear could be rationally manipulated and utilized to good purpose.³⁷ Plato and Aristotle suggest that fear of a foreign enemy might facilitate the achievement of political goals, especially maintaining political unity or fostering moral energy. In Plato's *Laws*, the Athenian tells Megillus that one of the causes of Athens's formerly "venerable constitution" and "willing subjection to the laws" was "the spectacle of the sheer magnitude of the military and naval armament" of the Persians. The Persian forces "threw us into helpless consternation, and led us to submit to laws and magistrates with a still stricter obedience."³⁸ Thus, the Athenians were convinced by fear of a foreign enemy to undertake certain actions. Aristotle, too, notes the importance of foreign enemies for maintaining regime stability and virtue in the *Politics*. In Book V, he argues that regimes may be preserved by having the things that destroy them near, "for when [men] are afraid [*phoboumenoi*], they get a better grip on the regime." Lawgivers and legislators, according to Aristotle, "should promote fears [*phobous*] . . . and make the far away near" to encourage citizen loyalty and service.³⁹ Similarly, Aristotle writes in Book VII that "war compels [men] to be just and behave with moderation, while the enjoyment of good fortune and being at leisure in peacetime tend to make them arrogant."⁴⁰ Thus, fear of foreign enemies can serve as a source of moral energy and political unity for Plato and Aristotle, inclining citizens to be more loyal and more virtuous.

Turning from Plato and Aristotle to Thucydides, we see that fear also plays a significant moral and political role in his *Histories*. In his narration of the Athenian plague, Thucydides analyzes the relationship between Athenian lawlessness and fear's restraining power. In the midst of the plague, the Athenians neglected honor and justice. This neglect derives from the absence of fear: "no fear [*phobos*] of god or law of man had a restraining influence."⁴¹ Fear of future punishment serves as a restraint on individual behavior, assisting in the maintenance of morality. Fear of aliens also fosters political action, for Thucydides, evident in his prefatory discussion

³⁷ On rationally manipulating emotions, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.13.1102b 25–33; 7.7.1149a26; Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Judith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. R. Hackforth (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 2270d–272a; Plato, *Republic*, 3.386a–392a.

³⁸ Plato, *Laws*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. A. E. Taylor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3.698b.

³⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 5.8.1308a25.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 7.15.1334a25.

⁴¹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin, 1972), 2.53. The Greek consulted is Thucydides, *Historiae*, ed. Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

of the origins of the Peloponnesian War. He argues that the war was caused, above all, by “the growth of Athenian power”; this growth compelled the Spartans to go to war (*anankasai es to polemein*) because of the fear (*phobon*) it created.⁴² Fear, in Thucydides’ narrative, is also a powerful persuasive tool in the speeches he presents—whether it is the Corinthians’ invocation of the prospect of Sparta’s allies being conquered by Athens or themselves abandoning the Peloponnesian League as causes for going to war, or Pericles’ suggestion that Athenian acquiescence to Spartan demands will lead to greater demands in the future.⁴³

The unifying and energizing functions of fear, along with its power to compel particular courses of action, feature in Roman historiography as well.⁴⁴ This role is unsurprising given, as Robert Cape writes, Roman historiography’s “overt didactic and moralistic purpose.”⁴⁵ Historians of Rome generally intended their histories to teach and to exhort. Cicero’s *On the Ideal Orator* reflects this understanding: for Cicero, the orator is the ideal historian, the only one whose voice is capable of granting to history the immortality it merits. Moreover, it is the orator in particular who can use history most effectively: the orator is able to “encourage to virtuous conduct . . . reclaim from vicious courses . . . censure the wicked . . . praise men of worth . . . subdue the power of lawless desire.”⁴⁶ Historians of Rome typically grant to the study or writing of history an overt political and moral role: Polybius, a Greek historian of Rome, writes that the study of history is “the soundest education and training for a life of active politics;” Livy suggests that history provides “lessons of every kind of experience” from which one might choose both “what to imitate” and “what is shameful;” and Sallust holds that “the recording of the events of the past is especially serviceable.”⁴⁷ The examples provided by history had an explicit

⁴² Thucydides, *History*, 1.23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1.72, 1.141.

⁴⁴ On fear in Roman historiography and Aristotelian rhetoric, see D. S. Levene, “Pity, Fear and the Historical Audience: Tacitus on the Fall of Vitellius,” in *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature*, ed. Susan Morton Braund and Christopher Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴⁵ Robert W. Cape, Jr., “Persuasive History: Roman Rhetoric and Historiography,” in *Roman Eloquence: Rhetoric in Society and Literature*, ed. William J. Dominik (London: Routledge, 1997), 217. Cf. A. J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (London: Croom Helm, 1988).

⁴⁶ Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2. 35.

⁴⁷ Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. W. R. Paton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929), 1: 1.1–2; Livy, *From the Founding of the City*, trans. B. O. Foster (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1919–), 1: *Praefatio* 1.10; Sallust, *War with Jugurtha*, in *Sallust*, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4.1.

persuasive moral function, providing models of behavior and character that might be imitated or followed.⁴⁸

To illustrate political fear's unifying and energizing role, let us turn first to the second-century Greek historian Polybius's *Histories*. Polybius intended this work to be of value to one pursuing "a life of active politics," as well as to show "how to bear bravely the vicissitudes of fortune" by learning of "the calamities of others."⁴⁹ His *Histories* chronicle Rome's rise, as well as the nature of Rome's rule upon attaining dominance.⁵⁰ In this work, fear's dual function as a source of unity and moral energy is evident in Polybius's analysis of the Roman constitution in Book VI. Polybius suggests that fear helped to promote the stability of Rome's constitution in two ways. First, the fear of foreign enemies helped to maintain Roman political community by facilitating cohesion among the conflicting elements of the Roman constitution. Thus, in describing Rome's blend of Senate, assemblies, and consuls, and "the power that each part has of hampering the others or cooperating with them," he notes that "whenever any danger from without [*tis exothen koinos phobos*] compels them to unite and work together," the parts function together with strength that is "extraordinary."⁵¹ Even absent this threat, Polybius writes that "we see the state providing itself a remedy for the evil from which it suffers" (i.e. the parts being "insolent and overbearing"), as "any aggressive impulse is sure to be checked and from the outset each estate stands in dread of being interfered with by the others."⁵²

The absence of collective fear might have negative consequences as well; we see this in the conclusion of Book VI, where Polybius speculates on the future of the Roman constitution. Polybius suggests that the absence of a foreign threat—that is, Rome's acquisition of "supremacy and uncontested sovereignty"—may lead to extravagance and to the "rivalry for office and in other spheres of activity" becoming "fiercer than it ought to be."⁵³ The result of such a change, Polybius suggests, would be a change in the

⁴⁸ On the "exemplary" character of Roman historiography, and especially Livy, see Jane D. Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Polybius, *The Histories*, 1: 1.1.2. For a discussion of Polybius's practicality, see F. W. Walbank, *Polybius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 28, 55–65. For a more moralistic reading of Polybius, see Arthur Eckstein, *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁵⁰ Polybius, *The Histories*, 1: 1.1.5; 2: 3.4.6–7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3: 6.18.1–2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3: 6.18.8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6: 57.5. Polybius makes a similar claim in 6: 31.25.5. Cf. Eckstein, *Moral Vision*, 264.

state “to the finest sounding of all, freedom and democracy,” but in fact “to the worst thing of all, mob-rule.”⁵⁴ Moral corruption is thus explicitly linked to the attainment of prosperity and the absence of a foreign threat.⁵⁵ Polybius goes so far as to suggest that Rome made war on the Dalmatians precisely because the Senate wanted “to recreate, as it were, the spirit and zeal [*hormas kai prothumias*] of their own troops.”⁵⁶

The role fear plays in subsequent Roman historiography echoes Polybius’s analysis. The historian Livy, for example, uses fear to help explain cohesion and moral energy in his narrative of the birth of Roman liberty and Rome’s rise to power. The problems with which Livy is concerned are clear from the First Preface: in his time “the might of a people which has long been very powerful is working its own doing”; “riches have brought in avarice, and excessive pleasures the longing to carry wantonness and license to the point of ruin for oneself and of universal destruction.” In answering the questions that drive his inquiry into Roman history—“what life and morals were like; through what men and by what policies, in peace and in war, empire was established and enlarged . . . how, with the gradual relaxation of discipline, morals first gave way”—his narrative can show his readers a cure (*remedia*) for the vices that plague Rome in the present. Livy’s concerns thus involve both the present and the past.⁵⁷

Livy is especially concerned in the early books with examples of Roman morality “which illustrate attitudes and actions to be emulated or avoided.”⁵⁸ A key concern in particular is the problem of establishing political harmony. Along with his general emphasis on the role of virtues (such as *fides* or *pudicitia*), fear’s positive relationship to civic harmony is present in his narrative of the establishment of concord in Numa Pompilius’s reign.⁵⁹ Numa is a second founder of Rome (after Romulus) in Livy’s narra-

⁵⁴ Polybius, *The Histories*, 3: 6.57.9.

⁵⁵ See Eckstein, *Moral Vision*, 74–75, 234.

⁵⁶ Polybius, *The Histories*, 6: 32.13.8. Walbank suggests Polybius’s “statement seems generally acceptable, though he may exaggerate this factor somewhat.” F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 3: 535.

⁵⁷ Livy, *From the Founding of the City*, 1: *Praefatio*. 9. On Livy’s history providing contemporary lessons, see Chaplin, *Livy’s Exemplary History*. On Livy’s concern for Rome’s ills and his turn to the past, see J. Briscoe, “The First Decade,” in *Livy*, ed. T. A. Dorey (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

⁵⁸ Ann Vasaly, “Personality and Power: Livy’s Depiction of the *Apia Claudii* in the First Pentad,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 117 (1987), 205. For a reading of Livy as a “non-political moralist,” see P. G. Walsh, “Livy,” *Greece and Rome: New Surveys in the Classics* 8 (1974): 11.

⁵⁹ On Book I and the ideal of *concordia*, see Robert Brown, “Livy’s Sabine Women and the Ideal of *Concordia*,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 125 (1995). For a reading that emphasizes “the means by which power is emphasized and

tive; he sought “to give the new City, founded by force of arms, a new foundation in law, statutes, and observances.” He recognized that it would be difficult to accustom the Romans to these new foundations while they were at war, “since their natures grew wild and savage through warfare.” Thus, he built the temple to Janus, the doors of which would be open in war and closed in peace; Numa then made peace with Rome’s neighbors so that “his warlike people should be softened by the disuse of arms.” Yet he feared that “relief from anxiety on the score of foreign perils might lead men who had hitherto been held back by fear of their enemies [*metus hostium*] and by military discipline into extravagance and idleness.”⁶⁰ As a result, he deployed religion in order to maintain discipline, and filled the Romans “with the fear of the gods [*deorum metum*].”⁶¹

Later in his narrative, and in much the same fashion as we saw in Polybius’s discussion of Rome’s war with Dalmatia, Livy suggests that Rome went to war with Liguria in 187 BCE because Roman elites thought war would help “to keep alive the military discipline of the Romans during the intervals between their great wars.” Such an enemy was necessary because Roman virtue had declined with the conquest of Asia: “Asia, on account of the pleasantness of its cities and the abundance of its treasures of land and sea and the feebleness of the enemy and the wealth of its kings, made armies richer rather than braver.”⁶² For Livy, as for Polybius, the fear of foreign enemies and the constraining effects of external warfare could function as a buttress of military discipline, a check on corruption, as well as a support for moral vigor.

Perhaps the most important examples of the idea of fear as a source of moral energy and unity in Roman political thought are featured in discussions of the elimination of Carthage and its consequences. One of the best

manipulated,” see Vasaly, “Personality and Power: Livy’s Depiction of the Apii Claudii in the First Pentad,” 205.

⁶⁰ On Livy’s adherence to the theory “that peace was liable to involve luxury” and the “degrading” effects of warfare, see R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy, Book 1–5* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 94–95.

⁶¹ Livy, *From the Founding of the City*, 1: 1.19. See also Cicero’s account of Numa’s reign: Cicero, *De Legibus*, in *Cicero: De Republica and De Legibus*, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 2: 26. On the political use of religion, see, e.g., Cicero, *De Legibus*, 2: 16, 2: 69; Cicero, *De Divinatione*, in *Cicero: De Senectute, De Amicitia, De Divinatione*, trans. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 2: 28, 2: 70. Cf. Neal Wood, *Cicero’s Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 171–73.

⁶² Livy, *From the Founding of the City*, 11: 39.1.2–3. Walsh notes that “Asia for the Romans epitomized luxurious living.” Livy, *Book XXXIX*, ed. P. G. Walsh (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1994), 107.

known instances of fear's use in this regard is related in Plutarch's *Life of Cato the Elder*. Plutarch reports that, prior to the outbreak of the Third Punic War, Cato was dispatched to Africa to investigate a war between Carthage and Numidia. According to Plutarch, Cato was displeased with what he found in Africa. Despite its defeat by Rome, Carthage was not weak, though the treaty they had struck with Rome "deprived them of their empire, and imposed a grievous money tribute upon them."⁶³ Carthage, Plutarch reports, was "teeming with vigorous fighting men, overflowing with enormous wealth, filled with arms of every sort and with military supplies, and not a little puffed up by all this."⁶⁴ Cato returned to Rome and told the Senate that Carthage's war with Numidia would soon be followed by war with Rome; he also dropped a Carthaginian fig on the floor of the Senate and informed his audience that "the country where it grew was only three days' sail from Rome."⁶⁵ Hostile as he was to Carthage on his return, more savage (*biaioteron*) was he in the phrase by which he concluded his speeches to the Senate: Carthage must be destroyed. Contrary to Cato, Publius Scipio Nasica customarily affixed a different phrase to the conclusion of his speeches: Carthage must survive. His justification, according to Plutarch, was not that Carthage posed no threat to Rome, but that "the fear [*phobos*] of Carthage should abide, to curb the boldness of the multitude like a bridle."⁶⁶ In Plutarch's narrative, fear of Carthage was not merely a source of moral energy, but a source of social cohesion and control, and was understood to be useful for such purposes by political elites.

IV. FEAR AND DECLINE IN THE WRITINGS OF SALLUST

Fear's dual role—its status as a source of moral vigor and unity—and its relationship to foreign enemies (particularly Carthage) are found most prominently in the monographs of Sallust, in which the concept of the *metus hostilis* arguably receives its fullest account and plays its greatest role in ancient thought.⁶⁷ In both of his extant monographs—the *War with*

⁶³ Plutarch, *Life of Cato the Elder*, in *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 2: 26.2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 26. 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.2.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of fear in Sallust's thought, see Neal Wood, "Sallust's Theorem: A Comment on 'Fear' in Western Political Thought," *History of Political Thought* 16 (1995): 174–89.

Catiline and War with Jugurtha—as well as the fragmentary *Histories*, Sallust documents Rome's decline from a past which he views as a golden age.⁶⁸ In early Rome, according to Sallust,

good morals were cultivated at home and in the field; there was the greatest harmony [*concordia*] and little or no avarice; justice and probity prevailed among them, thanks not so much to laws as to nature. Quarrels, discord, and strife were reserved for their enemies; citizens vied with citizen only for the prize of merit.⁶⁹

Prior to the destruction of Carthage, “fear of the enemy [*metus hostilis*] preserved the good morals of the state.”⁷⁰ The competitive pursuit of glory in the service of the state was the primary manifestation of Roman virtue, and these competitive energies were directed outwards at non-Romans. Concord within Rome and virtue among its citizens are thus strongly linked to the restraining effects of political fear.

In both of his monographs and the *Histories*, Sallust locates the origins of Rome's decline in the destruction of Carthage, and the subsequent loss of the restraining fear it inspired in Rome. According to Sallust,

when the minds of the people were relieved of that dread [*illa formido*], wantonness and arrogance naturally arose, vices which are fostered by prosperity. Thus the peace for which they had longed in time of adversity, after they had gained it proved to be more cruel and bitter than adversity itself . . . the community was split into two parties, and between these the state was torn to pieces.⁷¹

We have already seen that the early Romans were concordant, and that their virtues were displayed largely in external military struggle. Their virtues had extended, however, to the non-military realms of politics, punishment, and judgments of worth-while ends. Early Romans “in time of peace . . . ruled by kindness rather than fear,” and in war “punishment was more often inflicted for attacking the enemy contrary to orders” than for retreat;

⁶⁸ On Sallust's idealized past, see G. M. Paul, *A Historical Commentary on Sallust's Bellum Jugurthinum* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1984), 5, 125.

⁶⁹ Sallust, *War with Catiline*, in Sallust, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 9.1–3.

⁷⁰ Sallust, *War with Jugurtha*, 41.2.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 41.3–5. Cf. Sallust, *The Histories*, trans. Patrick McGushin (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1992), 1: 1.10–13.

glory was preferred to wealth.⁷² In short, early Rome was the opposite of the Rome in which Sallust found himself, where virtue no longer shone, poverty was shameful, and innocence was seen as a form of malevolence.⁷³

The origins of Rome's decline lie, for Sallust, in two specific causes: Rome's vanquishing of its enemies—especially Carthage—and its achievement of material prosperity.⁷⁴ Once Rome had defeated Carthage and become a prosperous city, fortune began to be furious (*saevire*) and to mix everything up.⁷⁵ This is not a result of fortune's power so much as the decline of virtue, which checks fortune.⁷⁶ The virtues that served Rome well during its conflicts with foreign enemies were no longer operative in the absence of foreign enmity, and Romans were unable to enjoy the benefits of peace: "leisure and wealth, desirable under other circumstances, [were] a burden and a curse." Sallust singles out avarice for blame in particular: he describes it as the building-material of all evil. The prevalence of self-interest due to the absence of fear leads to the perversion of friendship and to dissimulation; with time, "a government second to none in equity and excellence became cruel and intolerable."⁷⁷ Rome's consensus on what was valuable was inversed, with vice replacing virtue. These problems emerged, ironically, "as the result of peace and of an abundance of everything that mortals prize most highly."⁷⁸

Rome's corruption was also evident in the corruption of Roman moral language. Sallust has Cato, in the course of a Senatorial debate with Caesar concerning the proper punishment of Catiline and his fellow conspirators, argue that "in very truth we have long since lost the true names for things."⁷⁹ Cato's claim echoes a theme Sallust takes up earlier in the text, where he writes that those who "assailed the government used specious pretexts," making ideologically *optimatus* or *popularis* claims while "under pretence of the public welfare each in reality was working for his own self-advancement."⁸⁰ In both cases, the inversion of values occurs following the

⁷² Sallust, *War with Jugurtha*, 9.4–5.

⁷³ Sallust, *War with Catiline*, 12.1: "*hebescere virtus, paupertas probro haberi, innocentia pro malivolentia duci coepit.*" On Thucydides' influence on Sallust, see, e.g., C. S. Kraus and A. J. Woodman, *Latin Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

⁷⁴ Sallust, *War with Catiline*, 10.1; cf. Sallust, *War with Jugurtha*, 41.1–5; cf. Sallust, *Histories*, 1: 1.10–13.

⁷⁵ Sallust, *War with Catiline*, 10.1.

⁷⁶ See McGushin, *Bellum Catilinae: A Commentary* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 89.

⁷⁷ Sallust, *War with Catiline*, 10.6. On Rome's prior greatness, see also Sallust, *Histories*, 1: 1.9.

⁷⁸ Sallust, *War with Jugurtha*, 41.1.

⁷⁹ Sallust, *War with Catiline*, 52.11. Cf. Sallust, *Histories*, 1: 1.12.

⁸⁰ Sallust, *War with Catiline*, 38.3.

destruction of Carthage. Sallust's description of Rome's decline—in particular the mixing-up of categories and the inversion of virtue and vice—recalls Thucydides' description of the Corcyrean civil war. In Corcyra and elsewhere, in the midst of the changed circumstances that accompany revolution and civil warfare, “words, too, had to change their usual meanings.”⁸¹ For Sallust and Thucydides, virtues became vices, and vices became virtues.

Despite the influence of Thucydides' analysis of the perversion of language, Sallust reverses his claim in a crucial way. Sallust holds the inversion of morality that Thucydides saw as the consequence of civil warfare to be the consequence of peace and the absence of foreign enmity. Whereas war was a cruel teacher (*biaios didaskalos*) for Thucydides, for Sallust, it brought out the best in Romans through the behavioral constraints it gave rise to via fear.⁸² This distinction derives in part from Sallust's view of human nature as needing discipline and fear to channel human energies into proper directions. This view is most evident in the mind of Micipsa, who, in the *War with Jugurtha*, “dreaded the natural disposition of mankind, which is greedy for power and eager to gratify its heart's desire.”⁸³ Preventing this greed for power from turning inwards on Roman society required external enemies on whom to focus; so too did maintaining moral agreement.⁸⁴

The theme of *metus hostilis* is, then, central to Sallust's thought, and crucial in understanding his analysis of Roman decline. Mark Toher suggests that this theme became widespread in the late Republic largely because it was a useful way of explaining the pervasive social conflict of the period. Faced with a relatively recent and frightening development—violent domestic political conflict—Roman historians were confronted with the dilemma of writing a different kind of history. Early Roman historiography “did not easily allow for characterization of individuals and emphasis on their achievements.”⁸⁵ What mattered was the success of Rome, not the successes of individual generals; while there may have been earlier instances

⁸¹ Thucydides, *History*, 3.82.4.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 3.82.4.

⁸³ Sallust, *War with Jugurtha*, 6.3. On Sallust's view of human nature, see T. J. Luce, *Livy: The Composition of His History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 273. Cf. Sallust, *Histories*, 1: 1.8.

⁸⁴ See D. S. Levene, “Sallust's Catiline and Cato the Censor,” *The Classical Quarterly* 50 (2000): 170–91, esp. 190–91.

⁸⁵ Mark Toher, “Augustus and the Evolution of Roman Historiography,” in *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and his Principate*, ed. Kurt A. Raafaub and Mark Toher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 147.

of histories focused on individuals, “until Sallust there were no genuine examples of this practice.”⁸⁶ Toher suggests that when warfare was neither external nor in the service of the Roman community, and leaders had extraordinary commands (and personalities), it became more important to focus on individual characters and motivations. Whereas earlier Roman historiography (such as Cato’s *Origines*) showed the merit of Cicero’s claim, which Cato in fact inspired, that Rome’s superiority was due to the efforts of many, recent history showed that what had been made by many could be undone by a few. Sallust himself suggested that Rome’s successes were to be explained “by the eminent merit of a few citizens.”⁸⁷ Such outstanding individuals defied traditional modes of writing and understanding history, and required the attention of a new mode of historiography.⁸⁸

Early Rome was characterized by concord (*concordia*); with Rome at peace internally and at war externally, “citizen vied with citizen only for the prize of merit.”⁸⁹ With the absence of a foreign enemy, striving for virtue became striving for money and power. Sallust’s reliance on *concordia* to explain the contrast between early Rome and his own period likely obscures much complexity in both periods due to each being characterized by a particular attribute. Yet we see in the writings of Livy and Cicero a similar emphasis on the importance of concord (and its presence in early Rome) as well as the undesirability of discord.⁹⁰ Moreover, Sallust’s use of fear as a source of unity and moral energy recalls the persuasive use of fear in rhetoric, and underscores the role played by fear in Plato and Aristotle, as well as Thucydides, Polybius, and Livy. While Sallust may have deployed the *metus hostilis* more frequently and with more import than his predecessors, his use of fear is not anomalous.

V. THE DANGERS OF FEAR IN THE WRITINGS OF TACITUS

Sallust’s Rome was a community whose internal unity and moral energy depended on conflict, and ultimately the pressures of fear. In this regard,

⁸⁶ Toher, “Augustus and the Evolution of Roman Historiography,” 147. See also Levene, “Sallust’s Catiline and Cato the Censor.”

⁸⁷ Sallust, *War with Catiline*, 53.4.

⁸⁸ On the Roman constitution’s collective origins see Cicero, *De Republica*, in *Cicero: De Republica and De Legibus*, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 2.2. On Cato’s understanding of Roman history, see Levene, “Sallust’s Catiline and Cato the Censor,” 174–76.

⁸⁹ Sallust, *War with Catiline*, 9.1.

⁹⁰ See Cicero, *De Republica*, 1.49.

Sallust's Rome shares much with Plato and Aristotle's rightly frightened (but unified) communities and aspects of Polybius's and Livy's Rome. All of their treatments display the rhetorical properties of fear—namely, its ability to persuade groups to act in certain ways by evoking the prospect of future evils or diminished goods. Yet these uses of fear—the provision of political unity and the provision of moral energy—are largely treated as positive by the sources surveyed. However, political fear could have a negative function for classical writers, a function evident in the writings of Tacitus.

“Tacitus,” as Syme put it, “gives little away.”⁹¹ Yet it is certainly clear, despite Tacitus's elusive qualities, that political fear plays an important political role in his writings, in particular his *Annals*, *Agricola*, and *Histories*. This role was often negative. Whether one reads Tacitus as a republican critic of the Principate or a secret Machiavellian, two of the traits that characterize individuals that he censures center on fear: their fearfulness and their being feared.⁹² By contrast, he praises individuals who are courageous and do not inspire fear. For example, Tacitus praises Agricola because no one “had cause to fear his silence: he thought it more honorable to hurt than hate.”⁹³ Similarly, he praises the Stoic Helvidius Priscus in the *Histories* because he “showed himself equal to all of life's duties, despising riches, determined in the right, unmoved by fear.”⁹⁴

These individual qualities have political implications, for Tacitus, as fearful and dissimulating emperors impair virtue and liberty. Thus, the negative effects of Tiberius's dissimulation are evident in politics writ large, as Tacitus diagnoses Tiberius's rule as a “servitude all the more detestable” because “it was disguised under a semblance of liberty.”⁹⁵ Because of Tiberius's dissimulation, a “speaker . . . had to walk a strait and slippery road under a prince who feared liberty and detested flattery.”⁹⁶ At the same time,

⁹¹ Ronald Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 520.

⁹² See Peter Burke, “Tacitism,” in *Tacitus*, ed. T. A. Dorey (London: Routledge, 1969), 165–69.

⁹³ Tacitus, *Agricola*, in *Tacitus*, trans. John Jackson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 22.

⁹⁴ Tacitus, *Histories*, in *Tacitus*, trans. Clifford Moore (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925), 4.5. Cf. Tacitus's portrayal of Lucius Annaeus Seneca's suicide, see *Annals* XV.60–64.

⁹⁵ Tacitus, *Annals*, in *Tacitus*, trans. John Jackson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925), 1.81.

⁹⁶ Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.87. On Tiberius's illegibility, see Patrick Sinclair, *Tacitus the Sententious Historian: A Sociology of Rhetoric in Annales 1–6* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press), 62–66.

he inspired fear, an important element of the Principate under the Julio-Claudian dynasty; thus Tacitus describes the soldiers deployed on the day of Augustus's funeral as *velut praesidio*—like a garrison, presumably a reflection of the uncertain times. On that day, Tacitus reports, the troops were greeted with “the jeers of those who had seen with their eyes, or whose fathers had declared to them, that day of still novel servitude and freedom disastrously re-wooded, when the killing of the dictator Caesar to some had seemed the worst, and to others the fairest, of high exploits.”⁹⁷ Within this context of uncertainty, Tiberius is illegible, possessing an “inscrutable arrogance of word and look in speech.”⁹⁸ Thus Tacitus writes that “the diction of Tiberius, by habit or by nature, was always indirect and obscure.” Understanding his words was difficult for his senatorial audience, and not simply because of his style; his very power and the uncertainty that surrounded his accession gave rise to an atmosphere of fear, felt particularly by “the fathers, whose one dread was that they might seem to comprehend him.” Thus, in the trial of Lepida, says Tacitus, “it is not so easy to penetrate the emperor's sentiments . . . so adroitly did he invert and confuse the symptoms of anger and of mercy.”⁹⁹

The relationship between fearful and dissimulating emperors and collective fear served as an obstacle to virtue, for Tacitus. Vicious emperors tend both to experience fear, which they seek to remedy by dissembling, and to be feared because of their vice and dissimulation. During Nero's rule, “to be passive was to be wise.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Tacitus addresses Domitian's capacity for dissimulation in the *Agricola*, noting that Domitian was “an emperor unfriendly to high qualities.”¹⁰¹ Domitian greets Agricola's military success in Britain “with affected pleasure and secret disquiet.” Rather than be pleased his subordinate's success, he was perturbed, as his greatest fear was that “the name of a commoner should be exalted above his prince.”¹⁰² Domitian's distrust of Agricola does not derive only from the latter's merit, but also from his own incompetence. Domitian knew “that his recent counterfeit triumph over the Germans was a laughing-stock,” Tacitus tells us. He was not even able to muster up the customary parade of prisoners, and had to hire “persons whose clothes and coiffure

⁹⁷ Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.8.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.33.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.11, 3.22.

¹⁰⁰ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 6.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 39.

could be adapted to the guise of prisoners.”¹⁰³ Aware of his own mediocrity, and afraid to show it, Domitian focuses his suspicion and anger on the virtuous.

Fearing the silence of an emperor gives rise to a situation of sycophancy, flattery, and hypocrisy; it becomes impossible to speak what one thinks, and virtue becomes dangerous. This was not the case with all emperors. While Domitian’s frightful reign had created a situation within which Romans were “harsh” and “cynical towards virtues,” Tacitus extols Trajan, who “is increasing daily the happiness of the times,” and his predecessor Nerva, who had united “things long incompatible, empire and liberty.”¹⁰⁴ Neither emperor is as illegible and vicious, and hence frightful, as Domitian or Nero. The Flavian dynasty’s founder, Vespasian, is also praised because he inspires his subjects, rather than terrify them. He succeeded in curbing luxury whereas laws had failed those emperors who sought to combat it before him. Under his rule, “deference to the sovereign and the love of emulating him proved more powerful than legal sanctions and deterrents”; luxury declined correspondingly.¹⁰⁵ Vespasian also recognized merit, especially the merit of orators, according to Aper in the *Dialogue on Oratory*. Unlike others close to the emperor, who “owe their position to the advantages they have received from him,” orators possess “an element which they never got from an Emperor and which is absolutely incommunicable.”¹⁰⁶ Vespasian’s reign is in sharp contrast to the reign of his son Domitian, “an emperor unfriendly to high qualities,” during whose reign “virtues caused the surest ruin” due to the machinations of informers and the suspicions of *principes*.¹⁰⁷

The fear that characterizes the reigns of *principes* such as Tiberius, Nero, and Domitian is not positive, for Tacitus, but decidedly negative, leading to sycophancy, hypocrisy, and mediocrity.¹⁰⁸ Politics became a balancing act: as Tacitus has Galba tell his designated successor Piso, “you are going to rule over men who can endure neither complete slavery nor complete liberty.”¹⁰⁹ Just as politics became a balancing act, so, too, did living

¹⁰³ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 3, 1. On Tacitus’s praise of Nerva, see John Percival, “Tacitus and the Principate,” *Greece and Rome* 27 (1980): 119–33.

¹⁰⁵ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 3.55.

¹⁰⁶ Tacitus, *Dialogue on Oratory*, in *Tacitus*, trans. R. M. Ogilvie (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 8.

¹⁰⁷ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 42; *Histories*, 1.2.

¹⁰⁸ In this, they measure up poorly against Vespasian, Trajan, and Nerva. See *Agricola*, 3.55; *Histories*, 1.12; *Dialogue on Oratory*, 8.

¹⁰⁹ Tacitus, *Histories*, 1.16

under a *princeps* and trying to maintain one's moral integrity. For Tacitus, "submission and moderation, if animation and energy go with them, reach the same pinnacle of fame" which Stoics met "by the steep path of pretentious death."¹¹⁰ Such virtue was, though, a far cry from Roman virtue of old; but Tacitus has little praise for Stoic martyrs: he writes that "great men can live even under bad rulers."¹¹¹ Yet, as Tacitus writes, "the interests of peace required that all power should be concentrated in the hands of one man": Augustus and thence his successors.¹¹²

VI. CONCLUSION

I began this paper by discussing contemporary scholarly interest in political fear, as well as the view that we may distinguish between ancient and modern political thought by focusing on the status of fear. In this paper, I have shown that fear was understood to help provide the goods of moral energy and political unity by authors such as Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, Polybius, Sallust, Livy, and Plutarch. These uses of fear are strikingly similar to the uses of fear noted in my introductory discussion, and this positive role of fear has often been overlooked by scholars seeking to delineate modern from pre-modern thought on the basis of fear. In discussing the role fear plays in these sources, I hope not only to have drawn attention to a neglected theme in classical thought, but also to have provided a comparative historical resource for scholars interested in the nature and problems of political fear. The use of fear in ancient political thought was far from homogenous, however. As is evident in my discussion of Sallust's *Histories* and Tacitus, fear's political function could be negative as well as positive.

Having established these different uses of political fear, I return now to my introductory claim that a key concern for scholars should be isolating fear's particular uses. Drawing on my analysis of these sources, I suggest that fear's status in ancient thought depended on three factors. First, fear's status is partially a function of the number and qualities of those who experience it. While fear might serve a positive function in its persuasive role when dealing with groups, fear could be enervating in its effects on individuals, as seen in my discussion of Tacitus. Second, fear's political utility in

¹¹⁰ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 42.

¹¹¹ On Tacitus's attitude towards opposition, see Victoria E. Pagan, "Distant Voices of Freedom in the *Annales* of Tacitus," *Collection Latomus* 10 (2000): 358–69.

¹¹² Tacitus, *Histories*, 1.1.

ancient thought is partially a function of its source. Fear of foreigners might foster unity and moral energy; fear of powerful individuals within one's own polity, however, might promote disunity and moral weakness. Third, fear's utility is partially a function of the ends that it serves. Fear might be deployed rhetorically to encourage groups to pursue morally desirable ends; but fear could also be deployed to prevent individuals from acting at all. Fear's multiple and varied effects in ancient political thought indicate that the crucial issue involved in the study of fear is its particular uses.

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*“Following the Way Which Is Called Heresy”:
Milton and the Heretical Imperative*

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John Milton is widely regarded as a forerunner of Lockean liberalism, and so of the political thought of the English Enlightenment.¹ Indeed, already in 1698, Milton’s biographer John Toland had constructed a unified tradition of English liberalism running from Milton through Locke, and had exclaimed that “nothing can be imagin’d more reasonable, honest, or pious” than Milton’s advocacy of religious toleration.²

This picture of Milton as an “apostle of toleration”³ has continued to shape interpretations of his place in intellectual history. Milton is viewed alternatively as an advocate of human rights,⁴ as a proto-Habermasian thinker who conceptualizes the private sphere in distinction from a secular public sphere,⁵ and as a writer who “anticipates with a resounding magniloquence the principles of western liberalism articulated by John Locke and

¹ I am grateful to Ian Hunter for discussions of this material, and to the two anonymous *JHI* readers for their valuable criticisms and suggestions. I am also indebted to the participants in the Contested Histories seminar at the University of Queensland’s Centre for the History of European Discourses, where an earlier version of this paper was presented.

² John Toland, *The Life of John Milton* (London, 1699 [first published 1698]), 146–47.

³ This is how Nicholas von Maltzahn describes Toland’s Milton in his essay, “The Whig Milton, 1667–1700,” in *Milton and Republicanism*, ed. David Armitage, Armand Himy and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 251.

⁴ Hugh Wilson, “Milton and the Struggle for Human Rights,” in *Milton, Rights, and Liberties*, ed. Christophe Tournu and Neil Forsyth (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 21–30.

⁵ Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 58.

inscribed in the American constitution.”⁶ At the same time, however, scholars continue to note the tensions and paradoxes in Milton’s writing on liberty and toleration. Thomas Corns, for instance, observes that Milton presents “soaring generalizations” coupled with “significant exceptions” regarding individuals’ right to toleration,⁷ while Nigel Smith notes that intolerance seems to be built into the very structure of Milton’s theory of toleration, so that the whole theory is threatened by “inconsistency.”⁸

But such inconsistencies cannot be ironed out, since, as I hope to show, they are fundamental to Milton’s whole conception of toleration. Far from offering a secular, rationalist theory of toleration, Milton develops a radical theological account of the relation between heresy, faith and toleration. Throughout his prose works, and culminating in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, he moves toward a redefinition of heresy as the underlying “grammar” of authentic faith, and as the social glue which holds together a truly free (because radically Protestant) English society. Here, the right to toleration is grounded not in human nature as such, nor in adherence to any specific confessional dogma or institution, but in the subjective *practice* of radical religious individualism. In Milton’s account, the universalization of “heresy” (defined as individual choice) as the basis of the right to toleration thus has as its necessary corollary the exclusion of those who refuse to participate in this social order of autonomous religious choice.

My analysis in this paper of three of Milton’s major prose works, *Civil Power*, *Areopagitica*, and *De Doctrina Christiana*,⁹ will seek to clarify both the apparently secularizing direction in which Milton takes the concept of heresy, and the radical theological basis of this secularizing move. Milton’s account, I will argue, is one in which not only the right to toleration, but also the *exception* which ultimately defines that right, remains grounded in a specifically Protestant-theological understanding of the nature of faith.

I. CIVIL POWER: HERESY AND TOLERATION

In February 1659, Milton published a tract against state interference with religion, entitled *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes: Shewing*

⁶ Thomas N. Corns, “John Milton, Roger Williams, and the Limits of Toleration,” in *Milton and Toleration*, ed. Sharon Achinstein and Elizabeth Sauer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 74.

⁷ Corns, 73.

⁸ Nigel Smith, “Milton and the European Contexts of Toleration,” in *Milton and Toleration*, 43.

⁹ All citations of Milton’s works are from the Yale edition: *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82); hereafter cited as *CPW*.

That It Is Not Lawful for Any Power on Earth to Compell in Matters of Religion. This work includes Milton's best known account of the nature of heresy—an account that is, in many respects, remarkably close to that of Locke.

Milton begins *Civil Power* by defining religion as whatever pertains “chiefly to the knowledge and service of God.” If that is the definition of religion, then it follows already that religion will always involve differences of opinion. The ways of God transcend natural knowledge, and so are “liable to be variously understood by humane reason.”¹⁰ From the outset, then, Milton imports the notion of diversity into the very definition of religion. His point here is not (as it is for Hobbes) that the divine transcendence relativizes all religious opinions; rather, the fact that transcendent realities are grasped by human reason means simply that God will be understood in different ways by different individuals. Thus God's transcendent inaccessibility to “the light of nature”¹¹ constitutes the ground of religious differences.

Still, it would be a mistake to imagine that Milton is defending religious diversity in general: his concern in this tract is solely with “our protestant religion.”¹² Arguing that the authoritative function of scripture is mediated by individual conscience, he remarks that Protestant Christians “hav[e] no other divine rule or autoritie from without us . . . but the holy scripture, and no other within us but the illumination of the Holy Spirit so interpreting that scripture as warrantable only to our selves.”¹³ The external authority of scripture is thus accessible only to the internal illumination of the Spirit, so that no religious authority can transcend the subjectivity of the believing conscience. Indeed, Milton presses home the subjectivity of religious commitment, observing that “no man can know at all times” that he truly possesses the divine illumination and so interprets scripture correctly.¹⁴ As a result, “no man or body of men in these times can be the infallible judges or determiners in matters of religion to any other mens consciences but thir own.”¹⁵

What, then, should the state do about heresy? The word “heresy,” Milton insists, is merely a “Greek apparition.” People should not be frightened

¹⁰ CPW 7: 242. There are clear parallels here between the epistemological bases of Milton's and Locke's views of toleration: see John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 350–51.

¹¹ CPW 7: 242.

¹² CPW 7: 242.

¹³ CPW 7: 242.

¹⁴ CPW 7: 242.

¹⁵ CPW 7: 242–43.

by this foreign word, but should observe “that heresie, by what it signifies in [Greek], is no word of evil note; meaning only the choice or following of any opinion good or bad.”¹⁶ Indeed, even the New Testament writers speak of heresy in a neutral way; for instance, in Acts 26:5, Paul says that he was a Pharisee “after the exactest heresie of our religion.” After citing this verse, Milton observes with more than a little irony: “In which sense Presbyterian or Independent may without reproach be calld a heresie.”¹⁷ Although a significant neutralizing of the concept of heresy is implicit in this argument, Milton is not trying here to relativize heresy entirely. At this point, he is still concerned to speak of heresy pejoratively, as deviant choice. If it is true that heresy is simply the “choise . . . of one opinion before another,” it is nevertheless also true that heresy involves a *wrong* religious choice.¹⁸

But what does it mean to form a wrong opinion in religion? Milton answers this question with characteristic emphasis on the subjective role of conscience: the wrong or “heretical” opinion is any religious opinion which rests on external authority instead of on individual conscience:

Seeing therefore that no man, no synod, no session of men . . . can judge definitively the sense of scripture to another mans conscience . . . it follows planely, that he who holds in religion that beleef or those opinions which to his conscience and utmost understanding appeer . . . in the scripture, though to others he seems erroneous, can no more be justly censur'd for a heretic then his censurers; who do but the same thing themselves while they censure him for so doing.¹⁹

Orthodox opinion, in other words, is any opinion which seems right to the individual (Protestant) conscience, so that no individual believer can be censured by another. The flipside of this, of course, is that heresy exists wherever the individual Protestant fails to follow the light of conscience.

¹⁶ CPW 7: 247. This etymological point was commonly recognized, even among conformist authors. For example, in his anonymously published work on the evil of heresy, *The necessity of heresies asserted and explained in a sermon ad clerum* (London, 1688), Samuel Hill acknowledges that the Christian use of the term differs from the word's original use: “Heresie then, literally and generally importing Division, in Philosophy, among the *Greeks*, signifies the separation of Men into different Schools and Parties, upon the account of different Doctrines and Opinions, without any form of Excommunication, Execration, or Extermination from common and friendly Society” (3).

¹⁷ CPW 7: 247.

¹⁸ CPW 7: 247.

¹⁹ CPW 7: 247–48.

“He then who to his best apprehension follows the scripture, though against any point of doctrine by the whole church receivd, is not the heretic”; rather, the heretic is the one “who follows the church against his conscience and perswasion grounded on the scripture.”²⁰ In this way, Milton inverts the traditional heresy/orthodoxy nexus: those who seem to be orthodox may be the most heretical of all, while those who appear to be heretics may be the most orthodox.

In this account, what matters is not the content of religious belief so much as the concrete practice of believing. Orthodoxy and heresy are identifiable not by their doctrinal or confessional content but by their underlying epistemologies. Orthodoxy is belief that has been formed in the right way; it is a religious practice in which belief is generated from the individual Protestant conscience in response to scripture. Another person’s belief, on the other hand, may be materially identical with its orthodox counterpart, but it is nevertheless heretical if it has been formed in the wrong way, through reliance on external authority. Heresy, one might say, lies not in the *what* of faith, but in the *how*.

The immediate implication of this inversion of heresy should be plain enough: it is not Protestant sectarianism but Catholicism that constitutes the archetypal heresy. Schismatics with eccentric religious opinions may in fact be “the best protestants”; there is no limit to the range of possible opinions, since among Protestants there can be only “a free and lawful debate at all times . . . of what opinion soever.”²¹ But Catholics, in contrast, ground their belief on the testimony of the church, thus relinquishing the rule of conscience and so yielding to the practice of heresy. For this reason, Milton singles out Catholics as the only true heretics—indeed, the Catholic Church itself is precisely “a catholic heresie against scripture”²²:

no man in religion is properly a heretic at this day, but he who maintains traditions or opinions not probable by scripture; who, for aught I know, is the papist only; he the only heretic, who counts all heretics but himself.²³

Nevertheless, Milton insists that the management of heresy is a function of the church rather than the state. Heretics should be punished not by state

²⁰ CPW 7: 248.

²¹ CPW 7: 249.

²² CPW 7: 254.

²³ CPW 7: 249.

coercion, but by ecclesial excommunication.²⁴ While still assuming that heretics should be punished, then, Milton's proposal effectively reduces the management of heresy to zero: the only heretics are Catholics, and the only punishment due them is excommunication from the (Protestant) church. Thus in a single argument, Milton attempts both to invert the traditional understanding of heresy, and to remove heresy entirely from the jurisdiction of the state.

Notoriously, though, Milton goes on to suggest that the state should *not* tolerate Catholic believers. Like Locke, he offers a non-religious justification for this policy of persecution. Catholics should be persecuted not because they are heretics, but because they are "supported mainly by a civil, and, except in *Rome*, by a foreign power: justly therefore to be suspected, not tolerated by the magistrate of another country." Their persecution is, in other words, "for just reason of state more then of religion."²⁵ In short, having granted civil liberty to Catholics with the right hand, Milton withdraws it again with the left. His argument here is structurally very close to Locke's judgment that Turks "have no right to be tolerated" since they "deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince."²⁶ And while both Milton and Locke justify the possibility of persecution on ostensibly non-religious grounds, their respective arguments are clearly driven by specific theological commitments about the nature of faith and the relation between subjective piety and external authority—a crucial problem to which I will return later.

While *Civil Power* offers a subjectivized and distinctly Protestant account of heresy, Milton is still moving here within the general discourse of heresy as religious error, or (in the definition of John Owen) as "the *choice* or embracement of any new destructive Opinion."²⁷ As well as remaining close to this understanding of heresy as error, Milton's position in *Civil Power* is strikingly close to the later Lockean theory: the sphere of religious belief is sharply differentiated from the sphere of civil power, and individual liberty gives rise to the subjective right to toleration, irrespective of whether the individual's religious opinions are right or wrong.

Although this account of heresy is very familiar—and may justly be described as proto-Lockean—I now want to argue that, elsewhere in Mil-

²⁴ CPW 7: 249–50.

²⁵ CPW 7: 254.

²⁶ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* [1689], ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (London: Routledge, 1991), 46.

²⁷ John Owen, *A vindication of the animadversions on fiat lux* (London, 1664), 63.

ton's corpus, there is a move toward a quite different conception of heresy. To explore this alternative version of heresy, I will turn to two of Milton's other prose writings, one earlier than *Civil Power*, and the other later.

II. AREOPAGITICA: THE VIRTUE OF SCHISM

In November 1644, Milton published his famous defense of unlicensed printing, the *Areopagitica*. Against those who were anxious to prevent the publication of heterodox theological books, Milton offers a vigorous apologia for the value of public debate and theological diversity. Just as the human body needs exercise for health, so too, he insists, "our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise."²⁸ Truth can be attained only by hard struggle, and the publication of diverse and even heterodox books plays a crucial role in energizing this struggle. Thus Milton offers the judgment: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race."²⁹ Against such a "cloister'd vertue," Milton himself believes that the temptation of heresy will ultimately fortify and refine Christian faith.

Further, Milton sounds a distinctive Protestant note against the mere conservation of tradition: "Truth is compar'd in Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in a perpetuall progression, they sick'n into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition."³⁰ Authentic Protestant faith thus entails constant movement which is the exact opposite of unthinking conformity. Indeed, Milton appeals to his readers' Protestant sensibilities by observing that a Protestant who receives his beliefs from the authority of any religious institution will simply "live and dye in as arrant an implicit faith, as any lay Papist."³¹ To adopt such an attitude of implicit faith—that is, to accept beliefs without having won them personally through hard struggle—is nothing less than a betrayal of the reformation. Indeed, the only way to be true heirs of the reformation is to continue the process of religious and social reform right here and now in England; otherwise, we prove that "we have lookt so long upon the blaze that *Zuinglius* and *Calvin* hath beacon'd up to us, that we are stark blind."³² As in *Civil Power*, Milton thus argues here that truth is far too important to be left to the judg-

²⁸ CPW 2: 543.

²⁹ CPW 2: 515.

³⁰ CPW 2: 543.

³¹ CPW 2: 543.

³² CPW 2: 550.

ment of any religious authority. To believe something just because “[the] Pastor sayes so, or the Assembly so determines,” is to be “a heretick in the truth”—in such a case, “though [a person’s] belief be true, yet the very truth he holds, becomes his heresie.”³³

Although the *Areopagitica* offers this provocative comment on heresy, it has much more to say about the closely related theme of schism. With the bewildering proliferation of Protestant sects in the 1640s, one of the principal arguments for the licensing of the press was the threat of schism. Milton thus trains his sights on this argument, and he seeks to undermine as sharply as possible “these fantastic terrors of sect and schism.”³⁴ Scoffing at the anxiety of the bishops, he says:

There be who perpetually complain of schisms and sects, and make it such a calamity that any man dissents from their maxims. . . . They are the troublers, they are the dividers of unity, who neglect and permit not others to unite those dissever’d peeces which are yet wanting to the body of Truth. To be still searching what we know not, by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it . . . this is the golden rule in *Theology* as well as in *Arithmetick*, and makes up the best harmony in a Church; not the forc’t and outward union of cold, and neutrall, and inwardly divided minds.³⁵

The logic of this argument is similar to the logic of Milton’s characterization of heresy in the same work: just as the religious conformists are the real heretics, so too the bishops who insist on institutional unity are the real “dividers of unity.” They are promoting an outward and coerced unity to conceal the reality of “cold, and neutrall, and inwardly divided minds.” The problem, then, is that the progressive advance toward truth is halted by such “forc’t and outward union.” In contrast, Milton believes that free and energetic debate will produce an authentic, inward unity, even though, externally, “there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions.”³⁶

Milton takes his argument a step further when he claims that Christian unity subsists precisely *in* this clamour of diverse opinions. Earlier the same year, Thomas Hill had preached a sermon on religious conformity, and had

³³ CPW 2: 543.

³⁴ CPW 2: 554.

³⁵ CPW 2: 550–51.

³⁶ CPW 2: 554.

used the building of Solomon's Temple as a symbolic example of the evil of schism. Citing the early Protestant theologian Peter Martyr Vermigli, Hill writes:

It is an observation of a *Learned Divine*, from that passage [1 Kings 6:7] while the Temple was in building, there *was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any toole of iron heard in the house*; that thence wee should learn, in *Church affaires*, in matters of *Religion*, to manage all with sweet *peace* and *unanimity*; That no noise of *contentions and schismes* (saith hee) *might be heard*, O that God would grant this mercy, that in his house wee might all thinke and speake the same thing.³⁷

As Ernest Sirluck has noted,³⁸ Milton subverts this argument by attending to the larger context of the Old Testament narrative of the Temple's construction:

as if, while the Temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars, there should be a sort of irrationall men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and the timber, ere the house of God can be built.³⁹

Further, Milton argues, even the finished building remains an artefact of irreducible difference and diversity: "when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every peece of the building be of one form."⁴⁰ Indeed, while Thomas Hill had insisted that unity means "think[ing] and speak[ing] the same thing," Milton declaims: "nay rather the perfection [of the building] consists in this, that out of many moderat varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes . . . arises the goodly and the gracefull symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure."⁴¹ And changing the metaphor, he remarks that, in spite of all the differences within English Protestantism, there is a "firm root, out of which we all grow, though into branches."⁴²

³⁷ Thomas Hill, *The Good Old Way, Gods Way, to Soule-Refreshing Rest* (London, 1644), 39.

³⁸ CPW 2: 555 n. 244.

³⁹ CPW 2: 555.

⁴⁰ CPW 2: 555.

⁴¹ CPW 2: 555.

⁴² CPW 2: 556.

According to this argument, then, unity is not to be achieved *in spite* of differences and schisms, but precisely *through* the richly differentiated life of a free-thinking religious society. England's "perfection" consists not in blandly "think[ing] and speak[ing] the same thing," but in the "goodly and gracefull symmetry" that emerges from the co-existence of diverse sects and schisms. Such differing parties are not "continuous," but "contiguous": they are irreducibly different, existing side by side as the multiple components of a coherent social order. Milton's defence of schism is thus aimed at nothing less than a reinvention of the nature of the church itself—and, subsequently, at a theological reinvention of the nature of English society. The progressive movement toward truth is not a movement toward ever-increasing sameness, but toward sharply accentuated differences of religious choice and opinion. Divergences and schisms should not be expected finally to converge into a smooth unity, but instead to come together precisely in their differences, like the complex parts of a single building.

The argument here—published fifteen years before the tract on *Civil Power*—moves within a framework very different from that of the later work. While in *Civil Power* Milton takes it for granted that schism should be tolerated as a necessary evil, here in the *Areopagitica* he advances an argument not merely for the *toleration* of schism, but for the *virtue* of schism. In this work, the church is envisaged as a community of schism—a community structured and defined by religious differences. The noise of religious argument and debate is thus portrayed as the sound of harmony rather than of discord; the unity of the church subsists in difference.

In the *Areopagitica*, Milton does not yet seek to defend heresy as such. He thinks of it here, as in *Civil Power*, as religious deviance (albeit one that should be tolerated). But in his depiction of the church as a community defined by schism, he anticipates a later argument, in which the concept of heresy would itself be reinvented. In one of his late prose works, Milton would come to define the Christian community as a community of heresy, just as he has here defined it as a community of schism.

III. DE DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA: THE BELIEVER AS HERETIC

Milton's radical system of theology, the *De Doctrina Christiana*, was discovered in 1823 as a "complicated mess of manuscript"⁴³ among Milton's

⁴³ Roy Flannagan, *John Milton: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 74.

state papers. The exact date of composition is impossible to determine, and the manuscript itself evinces an ongoing process of correction and revision, so that it is best regarded as an unfinished work.⁴⁴ In any case, it is likely that Milton's work on the theological system had largely ceased by 1665, around the same time that he finished work on *Paradise Lost*.⁴⁵ So the treatise's opening epistle, which concerns us here, must have been written no more than five or six years after the tract on *Civil Power*.

While parts of this Latin systematic theology are rough and fragmented, the opening epistle is a highly polished work. Characteristically, Milton takes the opportunity to present a carefully constructed authorial persona: he assures the reader that in this treatise, as in all his earlier prose, he is writing as an uncompromising champion of individual *libertas*. The epistle begins with the individualistic assertion that "God has revealed the way of eternal salvation only to the individual faith of each person," so that "anyone who wants to be saved should work out his beliefs for himself." For this reason, Milton says, "I made up my mind to puzzle out a religious creed for myself by my own exertions," based solely on the authority of scripture. This personal theological exercise was necessary, since Milton found himself dissatisfied with all existing systems of theology; in his opinion, "all previous writers have failed in this attempt."⁴⁶ By his own exertion and by "long hours of study" over several years, he has thus developed his own system of theology.⁴⁷ Indeed, he has worked so hard and so long on this system that it has become his "dearest and best possession"—a possession that he now wants to share with the public out of sheer goodwill.⁴⁸

Immediately, however, Milton anticipates the reaction against some of his unorthodox ideas. After all, the ensuing chapters of the treatise defend such opinions as Arianism, antinomianism, anti-sabbatarianism, thnetop-

⁴⁴ See Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale and Fiona J. Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 66–68, 156–57.

⁴⁵ Here I am following Barbara K. Lewalski's dating in *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 415–16. On the complexities of dating the treatise, see Campbell et al., *Manuscript*, 39–68; and Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss upon Paradise Lost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 8–24.

⁴⁶ CPW 6: 117–18. My citations of this work are occasionally modified against the Latin text in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank A. Patterson et al., 18 vols. in 21 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–38).

⁴⁷ CPW 6: 120.

⁴⁸ CPW 6: 121.

sychism (or “soul sleep”), creation *ex materia* (as opposed to *ex nihilo*), polygamy, divorce, and the synergy of grace and works in salvation. In view of all this, Milton asks his readers to “avoid prejudice and malice,” even though “many of the views I have published are at odds with certain conventional opinions.”⁴⁹ Just as in the *Areopagitica* he had argued that open public debate leads toward truth, so he insists here that his unconventional opinions cannot “throw the church into confusion”; on the contrary, open and critical discussion will lead only to ever-increasing clarity. Moreover, he appeals to the Protestant conviction that ordinary believers as well as specialists should have access to the truth: “free discussion and inquiry . . . are allowed in the academic schools, and should certainly be denied to no believer.”⁵⁰ As usual, then, Milton is confident in the self-attesting power of the truth: “For we are ordered to find out the truth about all things, and the daily increase of the light of truth fills the church much rather with brightness and strength than with confusion.”⁵¹ Echoing the *Areopagitica*, Milton thus affirms the liberty of individual believers to assert and to discuss their own opinions. And as in *Civil Power*, he protests against the use of coercion in religion:

Without this freedom, there is no religion and no gospel; violence alone prevails [*sine qua libertate, religio nulla, Evangelium nullum est; sola vis viget*]; and it is disgraceful and disgusting that the Christian religion should be supported by violence. Without this freedom, we are still enslaved: not, as once, by the law of God but, what is vilest of all, by human law, or rather, to be more exact, by an inhuman tyranny.⁵²

While such arguments repeat themes that are familiar from Milton’s earlier prose, when he comes to the question of heresy, Milton sets off in a surprising new direction. To start with, his etymological comment on the term “heresy” is familiar enough: as in earlier works, he observes that the “invidious title” and “hateful name” of “heretic” is discontinuous with the way the term *hairesis* functions in the New Testament. It is therefore

⁴⁹ CPW 6: 121.

⁵⁰ CPW 6: 121. In contrast, many Protestant writers specifically attributed the rise of heresy to the theological ignorance of the uneducated classes. For instance, in *The necessity of heresies*, Samuel Hill condemns the “common People” who are led into heresy when “their ears itch after strange and empty Novelties” (26).

⁵¹ CPW 6: 121.

⁵² CPW 6: 123.

a “perversion of justice” when self-styled orthodox believers condemn as heretical “anything they consider inconsistent with conventional beliefs.”⁵³ In passing, Milton still concedes a pejorative sense of the term “heresy”: “nothing can correctly be called heresy unless it contradicts [the New Testament].”⁵⁴ But then, immediately, he presses the term “heresy” in a very different direction:

For my own part, I follow Holy Scripture alone. I follow no other heresy or sect. . . . If this is heresy, I confess with Paul in Acts 24:14: ‘following the way which is called heresy, I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and the prophets’; and, I add, whatever is written in the New Testament as well. Any other arbiters or supreme interpreters of Christian faith, together with all so-called implicit faith, I, in common with the whole Protestant church, refuse to acknowledge.⁵⁵

In this remarkable passage, Milton offers a construction of heresy that differs fundamentally from all his earlier discussions of this theme. Here, as an introduction to his own heterodox system of theology, he seeks to reframe the discourse of heresy in a way that evacuates the term “heresy” entirely of its pejorative sense. In *Civil Power*, he had accepted that heresy was religious error; but here, in the *De Doctrina*, he takes the term “heresy” and deploys it to describe the very essence of Protestant piety itself. The pejorative connotations recede from view as the word is restored to its primitive etymology. The heretic is simply the one who chooses; and since the essence of Protestantism is individual choice, the true Protestant *is* the quintessential heretic.

At a single stroke, then, Milton attempts to shift the discourse of heresy in a wholly new direction, by identifying heresy with the act of individual faith. As Janel Mueller observes, Milton’s earlier depiction of “a heretick in the truth” —someone who believes the right things in the wrong way—is “paradoxically transformed from negative to positive by now overtly stressing the pre-Christian personal sense of ‘heresy’ as an individual’s free, reasoned choice.” The epistle to the *De Doctrina* thus presents “a resonantly paradoxical self-portrait of the true Christian as heretic.”⁵⁶ Now,

⁵³ CPW 6: 123.

⁵⁴ CPW 6: 123.

⁵⁵ CPW 6: 123–24.

⁵⁶ Janel Mueller, “Milton on Heresy,” in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 32–33.

therefore, it is precisely the character of the authentic Protestant to be “a heretick in the truth”—to generate all religious belief from the autonomous deliberations of illuminated reason, under the guidance of the scriptures alone. Milton is thus a heretic just as the apostle Paul was: his heresy is the choice to worship God on the basis of God’s self-revelation in scripture. Indeed, scripture *is* Milton’s heresy, since his choice is determined solely by this authority; thus he insists, “I follow Holy Scripture alone; I follow no other heresy or sect [*haeresin aliam, sectam aliam sequor nullam*].” Here, where obedience to scripture is characterized simply as one possible heresy among others, all the weight is placed on the etymology of *hairesis* as “choice,” so that the usual religious sense of heresy as *deviant* choice simply falls away.

Moreover, this transformation of the concept of heresy takes a further step when Milton invokes the “whole Protestant church” (*universa Protestantium ecclesia*) as the proper site of heretical belief. It is a commonplace of sociological studies of heresy that “pressures from outside and inside a group produce anxiety about criteria of belonging,”⁵⁷ so that heresy serves the social function of marking the group’s boundary: the heretic, by definition, is the one who falls outside the negotiated boundary, and the resulting exclusion or persecution of the heretic “springs from the instinct for the necessity of group unity.”⁵⁸ This sociological commonplace is, however, inverted in Milton’s construal of Protestantism. Milton is a “heretic” precisely because he is a member of the “whole Protestant church.” It is his *inclusion* in this particular social group that eliminates the possibility of religious conformity and establishes the imperative of personal “heresy.” Precisely because he is a Protestant, Milton cannot acknowledge the legitimacy of any faith except that which is arrived at independently, nor can he accept any external arbiters or interpreters of faith. To do so would necessarily exclude him from the company of authentic Protestants (and of the apostle Paul, whom he portrays here as the archetypal Protestant, and so too as the archetypal heretic).

Heresy is, one might say, the underlying grammar of Protestant discourse; it is the unifying ethos of the Protestant community. Just as Milton depicts Catholic faith as “implicit” faith⁵⁹—as belief divorced from choice

⁵⁷ Rowan Williams, “Defining Heresy,” in *The Origins of Christendom in the West*, ed. Alan Kreider (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 322.

⁵⁸ Georg Simmel, *Essays on Religion*, ed. and trans. H. J. Helle and L. Nieder (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 114–15.

⁵⁹ CPW 6: 124.

—so he depicts Protestant faith as the unceasing movement of individual choice, and thus (in the proper sense) as heresy. In this construal, the concept of heresy is still being used to define the boundaries of Christian community. But here, the heretic is not the one *outside* the community, but the one *inside*. Simply put, the heretic is the true believer; heresy is nothing more or less than faith itself.

IV. THE HERETICAL IMPERATIVE

Whereas in *Civil Power* Milton presupposes an understanding of heresy as religious error, in *Areopagitica* and *De Doctrina* he begins to move language of “schism” and “heresy” in quite a different direction. First, in the *Areopagitica*, the concept of schism is imported into the definition of the church, so that both schism itself and the need for any state management of schism are sharply relativized. The logic of this reinvention of schism is later deployed in the *De Doctrina*, where the term “heresy” is pressed back to its classical, pre-pejorative sense of “choice.” The results of this move are striking. Thinkers like Locke (in England) and Christian Thomasius (in Germany) would later relativize heresy by observing that there is no objective standpoint from which one group can determine the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of another: as Thomasius writes, “each religion will be orthodox to itself, but heretical to . . . the others”⁶⁰; and in Locke’s words, “every church is orthodox to itself; to others, erroneous or heretical.”⁶¹ Milton’s argument in the *De Doctrina*, however, is not aimed at this kind of relativization. Instead, Milton relativizes heresy precisely by *universalizing* it. Since the essential characteristic of religious belief is choice, it follows that *all* religion is heretical.

What I think Milton is aiming at here is a thoroughgoing reinvention of heresy: a construction of “heresy” as a wholly positive concept, and indeed as a moral imperative. Faith *is* heresy; heresy (understood as choice) constitutes one’s inclusion in the Christian community, and so also one’s right to toleration by the state. In part, Milton achieves this reinvention of heresy by appealing to a highly formalized conception of religious faith. The specific content of faith is less important than the act itself of deliberat-

⁶⁰ Christian Thomasius, “On the Right of Protestant Princes regarding Heretics” [1697], translated as an appendix in Ian Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State: The Political Thought of Christian Thomasius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 181.

⁶¹ Locke, 24.

ing and choosing between alternative religious possibilities. In this view, therefore, one belongs to the Christian community not by virtue of any specific doctrinal or confessional commitments, but through a set of practices, through an epistemology of religious self-determination in which all external authorities are rigorously questioned and critiqued.

Once this vision of the church as a community of heresy has been glimpsed, Milton expects that the need for any specific policy of toleration will simply dissolve. There is a somewhat utopian coloring to all this, in as much as Milton is untroubled by the possibility that rival Protestant communities might simply erupt into violence and chaos. But this utopian coloring is precisely the point: Milton is not trying here to recommend a policy for the prevention of violence and conflict; he is trying to reconstruct the language and self-understanding of Protestantism itself in such a way that religious violence and state persecution alike will simply be ruled out in advance. The Protestant society which Milton envisions is a society whose underlying grammar—its social glue, so to speak—is heresy. In such a society, the universalization of heresy should constitute a *de facto* relativization of any single group's claim to orthodoxy vis-à-vis competing theories.

I say that Milton's account *should* relativize heresy—but it is important to ask whether Milton in fact achieves the degree of religious relativization that he is pursuing. If the underlying basis of a free society is the practice of individual religious choice, what then becomes of those who refuse to engage in this practice? What becomes of Roman Catholics, who simply refuse to become heretics in Milton's (positive) sense—that is, they refuse to make the individual conscience the locus of religious authority? In Milton's conception of English society, such persons are clearly excluded: their refusal of individualistic choice is tantamount to a repudiation of the entire social order, so that the possibility of their toleration by the state cannot even be entertained. In other words, Milton's relativization of heresy, if carried out as a social program, would lead to precisely the same impasse as Locke's theory of toleration: the practice of subjective Protestant piety gives rise to the right to toleration, but the resulting construction necessarily excludes those who do not practice such piety, or who practice the wrong kind.⁶² For all its uniqueness, then, Milton's reinvention of heresy finally leads to the same place as the Lockean theory. Although Milton's concep-

⁶² See Ian Hunter's analysis of the Lockean theory of toleration in *The Secularisation of the Confessional State*, 162–67, and in his unpublished conference paper, "The Tolerationist Programs of Thomasius and Locke," Natural Law and Toleration Conference, British Academy, London, April 13 2007.

tion of society is much more radical and fissiparous than Locke's, Milton still supplies the political architecture for his own radicalized ideal of a Protestant confessional state.

And although Roman Catholics constitute the exemplary case of a group excluded from the right to toleration, one cannot help wondering also about the place of ordinary Protestants within Milton's schema. A prescription of faith's radical individualism in distinction from authorities and institutions is all very well for an intellectual like Milton himself, but it is unlikely that the ordinary English Protestant would be able to measure up to these rigorous standards of individualism. One wonders whether it would have been possible for most seventeenth-century believers to engage in the kind of carefully measured deliberations and institutional critique that Milton prescribes—and, therefore, whether such persons would also fall outside the boundaries of the benevolent system of liberty and toleration. In short, Milton's vision of the Protestant church as a community of choice begins to look suspiciously like the vision of a Protestant intellectual elite, comprising those who—"elect above the rest"⁶³—have the necessary training and leisure to construct their own individual systems of belief, and who subsequently possess the subjective right to be tolerated.

In raising these questions, I am not suggesting that Milton's conception of toleration is merely "inconsistent," or that his otherwise rational theory of toleration is hampered by an unfortunate remainder of religious prejudice. On the contrary, Milton's theory of toleration is theological through and through. The right to toleration is grounded on a specific Protestant understanding of the nature of faith; and the exception to this right is inextricably connected to the whole logic of toleration. Indeed, the normative "centre" of Milton's theory is constituted precisely by its exception, by its exclusion of certain groups who are declared incapable of moral participation in the sphere of politics, and who thus forfeit the right to toleration.

But leaving aside such critical considerations, a final question presents itself: is there not something strangely prescient—something strikingly *modern*—in Milton's conception of heresy? In the *De Doctrina*, Milton envisages a society in which all persons ground their own beliefs on individual choice alone; a society in which choice is severed from the authoritative function of religious institutions; a society whose fundamental organizing grammar, therefore, is "heresy." Might it be possible that this idealized

⁶³ See the acute analysis in Stephen M. Fallon, "'Elect above the rest': Theology as Self-Representation in Milton," in *Milton and Heresy*, 93–116.

heretical society is in fact a distinctive Protestant anticipation of later social realities?

In his famous 1979 work on *The Heretical Imperative*, the sociologist of religion Peter Berger characterized modernity as the social universalization of heresy. Admittedly Berger's schematic depiction of a transition from "premodernity" to a unified epoch of "modernity" cannot be taken too seriously; but his argument nevertheless casts a suggestive light on the reinvention of heresy that we have been considering here. Berger argues that the proliferation of choice and the inescapable necessity of choosing form the very "fabric" of modernity.⁶⁴ Whereas in premodern societies, heresy was a deviation from more general situations of religious certainty, in modernity, heresy has become an "imperative": it is no longer merely a possibility, but a social necessity.⁶⁵ According to Berger, the "heretical imperative" is therefore "a root phenomenon of modernity." While heresy had once been "the occupation of marginal and eccentric types," it has now become one of the basic conditions of life: "heresy has become universalized."⁶⁶ Summarizing Berger's interpretation, Jacques Berlinerblau thus observes that "modernity itself is predicated on the heretical ethos," since "modernity makes choice the currency of all social existence."⁶⁷

Is this not precisely the kind of situation that Milton envisages when he universalizes heresy and makes it constitutive of all religious belief? If so, one could conclude that Milton's conception of heresy in fact points toward modern social realities in a way that is even more striking and more remarkable than the influential Lockean theory of toleration. If Milton wanted England to become a society whose currency was individual choice, then we might say he got what he wanted. Indeed, we might conclude that the emergence of a certain kind of "modernity" is precisely the social implementation of this theological drive toward choice (*hairesis*). It is the elimination of the possibility of heresy (*qua* error) through the universalization of heresy (*qua* choice). It is, therefore, the overcoming of heresy by the "heretical imperative."

The strikingly "modern" dimension of Milton's thought, then, is not any movement toward a non-religious secularization of politics. It is rather a profound *theologizing* impulse—the impulse to re-imagine and reinvent

⁶⁴ Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Anchor, 1979), 2.

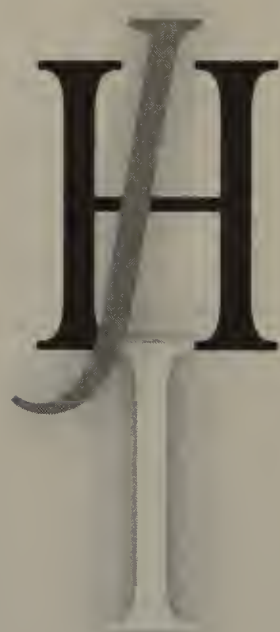
⁶⁵ Berger, 28.

⁶⁶ Berger, 30–31.

⁶⁷ Jacques Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology of Heresy, Orthodoxy, and *Doxa*," *History of Religions* 40 (2001): 333.

entire social orders theologically. And so, while many historical narratives portray the Enlightenment as a fundamental break with religion, in Milton's work the turn toward modernity appears not as a turn from religion to the secular, but precisely as the radical (and radically Protestant) reinvention of religion itself.

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A Virtuoso's History: Antiquarianism and the Transmission of Knowledge in the Alchemical Studies of Elias Ashmole

Bruce Janacek

On August 20, 1672, the antiquary and occult enthusiast, Elias Ashmole (1617–92) carefully recorded that he had acquired “Dr. Dees Manuscripts, all written with his owne hand” of “his Conferences with Angells.”¹ His precious acquisition was a manuscript by John Dee (1527–1609) that could be bound with Ashmole’s printed copy of Dee’s wondrous communication with his heavenly messengers, *A True & Faithful Relation Of What passed for many Yeers Between Dr. John Dee and Some Spirits* (1659).

Its provenance appeared to be traceable to its very composition over a hundred years before through the careful narrative of the wife of his friend and colleague, John Wale.² She recounted how the shopkeeper had acquired a cedar chest from the Woodall family, father and son surgeons, the younger of whom was surgeon to none other than Charles II. The shop-

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¹ British Library, Sloane MS 3677 f. 2 r. See also Deborah E. Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Nicholas H. Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 140–2 and 210–20.

² Christopher Whitby, *John Dee's Actions with Spirits* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), 1.

keeper believed the elder Woodall bought the chest when it was put up for sale along with the rest of John Dee's estate. The couple had the chest for twenty years or so, until about 1662 ("about 4 years before the fatal Fire of London"³) when, upon moving it in their house they heard "some loose thing rattle in it." Her husband examined the chest and discovered a "private drawer" containing "divers Bookes in Manuscript & papers" and a smaller box that contained a rosary.⁴

There was surely a note of apology if not embarrassment as Mrs. Jones explained what happened next. They did not make much of their discovery of the books because "they understood them not" and their servant, noticing their lack of interest in these mysterious papers, proceeded to tear off sheets to line her pie plates.⁵ To the relief of Ashmole (and past and present custodians of the past), the owners discovered the work of their overly efficient servant and preserved the remaining papers, even saving them (but not their cleverly designed chest) from the flames of the Great Fire of London. Wale now presented the extant manuscript of England's most celebrated magus—and a pretty fair antiquary in his own right⁶—and merely requested in return a copy of Ashmole's recently published *The Institution, Laws & Ceremonies Of the most Noble Order Of The Garter*, which Ashmole happily provided "fairly bound, & gilt on the Back."⁷

Almost as a curator of fine art traces the ownership of a painting through extant bills of sale and auction records, Ashmole recorded the provenance and details of the narrative. Where did the manuscript come from? Who owned it? How did it come into their possession? Could the author be verified? These were often hard, sometimes impossible questions to answer but they were crucial to the early modern antiquary. It was surely the well-documented, unambiguous answers to these questions and the fact that the manuscript was indisputably by the hand of John Dee that pleased him so much.

Ashmole was an immensely learned and curious individual and brought numerous perspectives to any single issue or text. In addition to antiquarianism and the occult, he was also very interested in botany, medicine, numismatics, heraldry, political and ecclesiastical history and local antiquarian history—many of which, as we will see, were relevant for him

³ British Library, Sloane MS 3677 f. 2 r.

⁴ Ibid., f. 3 r.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ William H. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 34–5, 93, 118–20.

⁷ British Library, Sloane MS 3677 f. 2 v.

to understand occult texts. For Ashmole was that most elusive of creatures—an early modern virtuoso.⁸ Contemporaries used this term to describe an individual with numerous interests, talents and skills and Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637), Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) and Sir Kenelm Digby (1603–1665) were just a few of Ashmole’s fellow virtuosi.

However, it is precisely the virtuoso’s considerable interests that complicate our ability to comprehend their work and goals. Historical scholarship, for good reasons, has tended to focus on either a humanistic approach that considers political, ecclesiastical or cultural interests or those that approximate the natural sciences such as astronomy, mathematics, medicine or even the occult. Recent scholarship has begun to study antiquaries and virtuosi less discretely and such contributions are crucial because only then do we appreciate the degree to which early modern scholars viewed knowledge as unified.⁹

It may be ambitious, if not arrogant, to attempt to correlate enterprises as vast as early modern alchemical and antiquarian traditions and surely neither approach will receive deserved attention in a single essay.¹⁰ However, when we begin to reconstruct the intellectual connections and relationships of early modern virtuosi, we gain more historically grounded insights into the intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century. Many years ago Walter Houghton observed, “The study of virtuosity is therefore a study in sensibility.”¹¹ Examining the continuum between Ashmole’s alchemical and antiquarian work will provide us with precisely such a sensibility, a glimpse of how an early modern virtuoso could perceive the past. A study of Ashmole’s antiquarian approach to alchemy will provide an appreciation of the precision with which alchemical texts were read and critiqued and a deeper understanding of how knowledge of the past was conveyed to later generations. Recent scholarship on its practices has revealed alchemy to be a far more precise, rigorous practice than had been

⁸ The classic study remains Walter E. Houghton, Jr., “The English Virtuoso in the Seventeenth Century,” parts 1 and 2, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3 (1942): 51–73; 190–219. More recently, see Peter Miller, *Peiresc’s Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁹ See Gianna Pomata and Nancy G. Siraisi, eds., *Historia* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005).

¹⁰ See Michael Hunter’s groundbreaking work, *John Aubrey and the Realm of Learning* (New York: Science History Publications, 1975). The challenges this approach poses are noted in Stephen Clucas, ed., *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 11.

¹¹ Houghton, 57.

appreciated.¹² While there is little extant evidence of how Ashmole practiced his alchemical work, we will see how Ashmole applied his exacting antiquarian skills to the excavation and study of the historical alchemical tradition. This essay explores the ways in which two spheres of early modern knowledge, the subject of quite separate historiographies, interacted in the mind of a single scholar.

Individual appreciations of alchemy in the seventeenth century are as numerous as its practitioners and Ashmole's was as specific as any other adept's. Because alchemists had so many different goals, it is not feasible to discuss them in the present essay. However, Ashmole was one of a number of early modern alchemists who shared a particular alchemical philosophy. Like Dee nearly a century before, Ashmole believed that he and other adepts' search were not merely efforts to transmute a base metal such as lead into a precious one, usually gold. Some alchemists attributed vast, even cosmological significance to their work, believing they were purging the natural world of its impurities, redeeming a natural world that had fallen as surely as Adam and Eve had fallen. The philosophers' stone was therefore often associated with explicitly theological themes of redemption and restitution.¹³

Using St. Dunstan's manuscript, "De Occulta Philosophia," Ashmole explained the powers of the "Minerall," "Vegitable" and "Magical" stones.¹⁴ However impressive the powers of these stones were, they paled next to the "Angelical Stone" which could not be seen, felt or weighed "but Tasted only."¹⁵ With this stone one could converse with angels through dreams or revelation and counter any evil spirit. He described the Angelical stone as above the others; it possessed a divine power, one that

¹² William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe, *Alchemy Tried in the Fire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 38 and in *passim*.

¹³ B. J. T. Dobbs, *Alchemical Death and Resurrection* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Libraries, 1988), 25; Harkness, 54, 141–43 and in *passim*; Pamela O. Long, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 144–45. Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman have critiqued spiritual associations in alchemical work but acknowledge that Ashmole and others were part of a "supernatural" circle of alchemists. See their essay, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy" in *Secrets of Nature*, ed. William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 385–431, esp. 399.

¹⁴ Lauren Kassell, "Reading for the Philosophers' Stone," in *Books and the Sciences in History* Marina Frasca-Spada and Nick Jardine, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 132–50, 135. See also her insights on Ashmole's techniques in *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 112 n., 175, 230.

¹⁵ Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (London: Printed by J. Grismond for Nath: Brooke, at the Angel in Cornhill, 1652), Sig. A 4 v.–Sig. B v.

allowed them to converse with angels. It was a stone feared by evil spirits, that “no Devill can stay or abide.”¹⁶ Alas, only three individuals in history ever possessed this stone: Hermes, Moses and Solomon.¹⁷ Its lineage was believed to extend to some of the earliest moments of humanity itself and yet its purpose and goals were always focused both on the present days and the days to come. Alchemy could therefore be associated with apocalypticism.¹⁸ While we will not be discussing alchemical practices, much less examining its theological and philosophical ambitions, as we proceed, we should bear in mind the vast goals Ashmole and other alchemists believed could be achieved through their efforts.

However, Ashmole’s blithe, even commonplace comment that only the ancient Hebrew prophets, Moses and Solomon, and the mysterious figure, Hermes Trismegistus, were fortunate enough to have obtained the Angelical stone betrays his particular approach to alchemical work because the opening passages of his *Prolegomena* were devoted not to the philosophers’ stone itself but to his own antiquarian goals.¹⁹ He complained that, “Our English Philosophers Generally, (like Prophets) have received little honour . . . in their owne Countrey.”²⁰ Alchemy was, therefore, as much a part of the past as it was the future.

The work of antiquaries was as enormous and varied as the work of alchemists. Beginning with Arnaldo Momigliano’s seminal essay, sophisticated studies of the influence of early modern antiquarianism have taught us a great deal.²¹ Defining what an antiquary was precisely is endlessly elusive but by the fifteenth century, antiquaries began to set themselves apart from historians by their insistence on examining personally extant historical and archaeological sources. The redoubtable book collector, humanist and antiquary, Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) took great pride in clearing away overgrown brush to read Roman inscriptions.²² Antiquaries’ interests

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., Sig. B 2 r.

¹⁸ See Harkness, 5 and 41.

¹⁹ Peter Miller, “The ‘Antiquarianization’ of Biblical Scholarship and the London Polyglot Bible (1653–57),” *JHI* 62 (2001): 463–82, esp. 464.

²⁰ Ashmole, *Theatrum* Sig. A 2 r.

²¹ Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (1950): 285–315; Idem, ch. 3 “The Rise of Antiquarian Research” in *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 54–79. The literature Momigliano’s work spawned appears in subsequent notes.

²² Anthony Grafton, *What was History?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 84.

began with the study of antiquities but they defined this term in its broadest sense: origins of kingdoms, languages, customs, institutions and offices. Antiquaries' sources for their research were therefore very broad as well. They included written sources but antiquaries also recorded and studied inscriptions on tombs or gravestones, monuments, altars, vaults or stained glass. Graham Parry is probably correct to note that for these reasons and more, the work of seventeenth-century antiquaries "was more imaginative, varied and exciting" than that of their counterparts in history.²³ This was distinct from early modern historians who confined their work largely to the study of politics and particularly how the political decisions of the past might inform the present.²⁴ Antiquaries might have a political goal in mind but that purpose was usually subsumed within a larger study of a tradition or an institution.²⁵ Mysterious and esoteric yet possessing a richly recorded history, alchemy must have been an ideal tradition for Ashmole to chronicle. When he referred to the collection of alchemical texts that he published in his *Theatrum*, he called them his "Collected Antiquities."²⁶

Daniel Woolf has pointed out that early modern antiquaries' approach to the past divided roughly into two different directions, philological and archaeological, although certainly, as we will see with Ashmole—and this was not unusual—an antiquary could employ both approaches quite effectively. The philological approach was quite similar to techniques used by humanists since the fifteenth century: determining accurate texts of the past and subjecting them to rigorous criticism in order to understand better "the culture that created them."²⁷ The archaeological approach required antiquaries to remove themselves from libraries to visit and record funeral monuments, ruins—in short, any physical remains of past cultures. This work produced almost a new genre of historical writings, "chorographies," detailed, often first-hand writings about particular places.²⁸ The goal of both

²³ See Parry, 9–14, esp. 14 and see also Arthur B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979), 52.

²⁴ Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 133–4; Sherman, *John Dee*, 75–78, esp. 75, 125–26; Malcom Smuts, "Court-Centered Politics and the Uses of Roman Historians, c. 1590–1630" in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake, eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 21–43, esp. 41–43.

²⁵ See D. R. Woolf's discussion of John Selden's *The Historie of Tithes* (1618) in *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 216–42.

²⁶ Ashmole, *Theatrum* Sig. A 4 v.

²⁷ Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 142.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 142–44. See also Michael Hunter, *Elias Ashmole 1617–1692* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1983), 11 and Grafton, *What was History*, 121.

approaches was the same though: to provide the most accurate records possible of past cultures and traditions.

For these reasons Ashmole was consumed with the notion of precision when he examined alchemical texts. His precision perhaps did not yield the predictability that Bacon and his successors advocated, but Ashmole and his fellow antiquaries believed precision could be achieved through extant historical records and in surviving archaeological *arcana*. In his classic study, *English Scholars*, David Douglas examined how historical inquiry flourished after the Restoration. In Restoration England, Church of England divines defended their institution through historical research, lawyers justified the legal system by demonstrating its antiquity and Parliament sponsored studies of its medieval foundation.²⁹ In the thousands of pages in Ashmole's manuscript collection, he compiled as precise a record as possible of aspects of England's intellectual and cultural past, a past that included a rich alchemical tradition.³⁰

ASHMOLE'S ANTIQUARIAN AND HISTORICAL APPROACH TO ALCHEMY

Ashmole's interests in antiquarianism, natural philosophy, heraldry and history were evident above all in his collecting and in the curiosity cabinet he eventually assembled. He catalogued the Tradescant family's collection of "rarities" and his acquisition of this collection (apparently given to him in exchange for cataloguing the collection) laid the foundation for what became the Ashmolean Museum.³¹ This collection and Ashmole's contributions to it included items recovered from nature such as "Some kindes of Birds their Egges, Beaks, Feathers, Clawes, and Spurres," "A natural Dragon, above two inches long," minerals, fossils, shells, "Outlandish Fruits from both the Indies," and antiquities such as ancient weapons, vases and utensils. In addition to these items there was also the *flora* from the renowned Tradescant gardens.³²

²⁹ David C. Douglas, *English Scholars* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), 18.

³⁰ See Ashmole's commonplace books, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS 763 ff. 195–7. See also Kassell, *supra* n. 14, 144.

³¹ R.T. Gunther, *The Old Ashmolean: The Oldest Museum for the History of the Natural Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 1–2; Hunter, *Ashmole*, 25–26; Martin Welch, "The Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum" in Arthur MacGregor, ed., *Tradescant's Rarities: Essays on the Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 40–58.

³² John Tradescant, *Musaeum Tradescantium: Or, A Collection Of Rarities. Preserved At South-Lambeth neer London By John Tradescant* (London: Printed by John Grismond, and are to be sold by Nathanael Brooke at the Angel in Cornhill, 1656), in *passim* esp. 1–6, 26. Arthur MacGregor, "The Tradescants: Gardeners and Botanists" in *Tradescant's*

Ashmole was not, however, only a collector of *naturalia* and *artificialia*. His collection of heraldic, astrological and alchemical manuscripts is one of the largest manuscript collections in Oxford's Bodleian Library. He also owned over a thousand printed books, which, in addition to titles on heraldry also included histories, biographies, religious and devotional treatises, topics in natural philosophy such as astronomy and botany, books on natural magic and occultism, particularly alchemy and astrology, volumes devoted to medicine, travel literature, dictionaries, almanacs and encyclopedias and a handful of political treatises. This collection was built painstakingly, often relying on personal and familial connections. (For example, Sir William Dugdale [1605–1686] bequeathed his manuscript collection to Ashmole, both his colleague and his son-in-law.³³) When the Ashmolean Museum opened in 1683, it was housed in a building designed to hold a chemical laboratory, a lecture hall, two libraries, one devoted to chemistry, the other to natural philosophy and of course a floor for the collection itself.³⁴ Ashmole and his circle had established certainly the most impressive cabinet of curiosities in England and certainly one that rivaled the magnificent collections of Ulisse Aldrovandi or Athanasius Kircher on the Continent.³⁵

In the midst of all these interests and activity, Ashmole was also an occultist, a moniker that describes an individual who turned to traditions such as alchemy, astrology or magic to understand or even manipulate the natural world.³⁶ He cast thousands of astrological nativities for himself, his circle of patrons and friends, even “of learned men” and “old English Astrologers that lived, above a hundred yeares since.”³⁷ He collected hundreds of alchemical recipes and treatises, editing and publishing three al-

Rarities: Essays on the Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum, ed. Arthur MacGregor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 3–16, esp. 3.

³³ Graham Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 224 and 248. William Dugdale was one of England's preeminent antiquaries whose documentary local history, *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1656), set the standard in accuracy and method. See Hunter, *John Aubrey*, 149.

³⁴ Gerard Turner, “The Cabinet of Experimental Philosophy” in *The Origins of Museums* Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 214–22, esp. 220–21.

³⁵ Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 17 and 46–47.

³⁶ Brian P. Copenhaver, “Natural Magic, Hermetism, and Occultism in Early Modern Europe in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 261–301, esp. 289.

³⁷ Hunter, *John Aubrey*, 121.

chemical volumes between 1650 and 1658. Perhaps because of their seemingly relentless search for legitimacy, alchemists often included discussions of their history within their mysterious commentaries and recipes. However, when Ashmole attempted to confirm the veracity of alchemical claims he was inherently distinguishing himself from an antiquary such as Athanasius Kircher who studied esoteric traditions because they illuminated a past culture regardless of any wisdom they might possess.³⁸

When Ashmole translated and published Arthur Dee's *Fasciculus Chemicus* in 1650, he acknowledged his debt to the previous generations who had saved the knowledge he was about to chronicle: "We are not a little beholding to the industry of our Ancestors, for collecting into Books this Elemented Water falling from Heaven, as into so many several Vessels or Cisterns; and there reserving it for our times and use; which else would have soaked away, and insensibly lost itself in the Earth of Oblivion."³⁹ The precious "Elemented Water" may have fallen from heaven but if it had not been caught and stored in vessels by himself and his antiquarian brethren, it would have simply soaked into the "Earth of Oblivion."

However, Ashmole was not so much interested in giving his approval of antiquarian goals as he wanted to explain antiquarian methods and skills. In his *Prolegomena* to the *Theatrum*, he exclaimed, "My Annotations are limited within the Bounds of what is Historicall, or what occasionally must needs intrench on the Confines of other Arts, and all glosses upon the Philosophicall Worke purposely omitted . . ."⁴⁰ In his *Fasciculus Chemicus* he said that Dee had harvested "the onely few and pertinent Things, from the rest of their large and unnecessary Discourses," just as a "skillful Chymist" whose alchemical work distilled the "fine and pure" from the "gross and earthy." Ashmole explained how Dee worked through the manuscripts, deciding which were most relevant to the argument he was constructing. He said, "these Collections were not rashly, or with slight choice, snatcht or stript from the whole bulk of Authors; but with a wary and heedful Judgment, culled out and selectly chosen."⁴¹ The ancients offered them to us "scattered and confused" but thanks to Dee's efforts, "we are much neerer to finde out the right path by the order."⁴²

³⁸ Cf. Daniel Stolzenberg, "Four Trees, Some Amulets, and the Seventy-two Names of God" in *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything*, ed. Paula Findlen (New York: Routledge, 2004), 149–69, esp. 163–65.

³⁹ Elias Ashmole, *Fasciculus*, n.p.

⁴⁰ Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum*, n.p.

⁴¹ Ashmole, *Fasciculus* Sig. A 5 r.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Sig. A 5 v.

Ashmole was skeptical of neat, tidy narratives and thought an honest inquiry was rarely a “Methodical Chain” but rather “irregularly pursued; sometimes the beginning being disposed in the middle, the middle in the end, &c.” He acknowledged the role of the active reader in this exercise: “And besides, part of the Philosophers sentences may (and must) as well be referred to other Chapters, and under other Heads; and left for the industrious and painful Contemplator to set and joyn together.”⁴³ Far from a passive observer, the reader was actively engaged in a joint enterprise with the virtuoso to summon knowledge of the past to be used for present purposes.⁴⁴

The *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* differs from *Fasciculus Chemicus* in a few crucial ways. First, unlike *Fasciculus Chemicus*, in which Dee read and synthesized the alchemical manuscripts he had at his disposal, the *Theatrum* is a compilation of 31 separate alchemical treatises, ranging from Thomas Norton’s *Ordinall of Alchemie* (which runs to over a hundred pages) to fragments of texts which are less than a single printed page. These treatises were reproduced in their extant condition and printed so that each could be read individually.

Ashmole published this collection as an English response to the enormously influential series of treatises, *Theatrum Chemicum*, which appeared on the Continent between 1621 and 1626.⁴⁵ His efforts were not fundamentally different from the work of earlier antiquaries, notably William Camden and Robert Cotton. The patronage Camden received to produce his magisterial *Britannia* (1586) was completed with the understanding that such a volume would illustrate, even celebrate the accomplishments of the English.⁴⁶ Cotton had similar motivations for planning an ecclesiastical history of Britain, though he never completed it. Wanting to demonstrate as fully as possible the birth and growth of the Church in Britain, its youthful rigor and the continuity of its faith from its Roman beginnings to its Saxon heritage, Cotton built his library to some extent with these goals in mind.⁴⁷ Although Cotton’s own work never made it to print, Archbishop James Ussher made full use of Cotton’s library to produce his magisterial *De Britannica Ecclesiarum Antiquitate* (1639). Ashmole had much the same moti-

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See D.R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 79–131; Michael Hunter, *John Aubrey, supra* n. 10, 178–91.

⁴⁵ *Theatrum Chemicum* (Strasbourg, 1621–1626).

⁴⁶ Parry, 22 and Woolf, *The Idea of History*, 12.

⁴⁷ Parry, 4–5; Kevin Sharpe, *Sir Robert Cotton 1586–1631* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 31, 33–34.

ventions when he began to compile his *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* and was determined to demonstrate that the English alchemical tradition was second to none.

Beginning his antiquarian excavations, Ashmole set to work on a profound event of the English Reformation: the dissolution of the monasteries.⁴⁸ He lamented that alchemical manuscripts may have been lost when the monasteries were dissolved in the wake of the Henrician Reformation: “A judicious Author speaking of the Dissolution of our Monasteries, saith thus: Many Manuscripts, guilty of no other superstition then Red letters in the Front, were condemned to the Fire; and here a principall Key of Antiquity was lost to the great prejudice of Posterity.”⁴⁹ Of course, Ashmole was not alone with such a sentiment. In his *Church-History of Britain* (1655), Thomas Fuller wrote with horror the dissolution of the monasteries had on their accompanying libraries while antiquaries wrote wistfully of the architectural losses that decision accompanied.⁵⁰

The dissolution of the monasteries was, however, more than simply a moment in which alchemical secrets might have been lost; Ashmole recorded that some monks had been successful in their search for the philosophers’ stone. In a blank interleaf of his personal copy of the *Theatrum*, he related an account he learned when one abbey was being leveled. When one of the walls of Bath Abbey was being pulled down, a bottle “full of Red Tincture” was discovered and tossed on a dunghill, promptly coloring it red. Wherever the dung was spread, the corn that grew from it was “wonderfully ranke, thick & high, insomuch as it was then looked upon as a wonder.” However, more significant for our purposes was Ashmole’s record of sources for this event:

This Belcher & Foster (2 Shoemakers of Bath, who dyed about 20 yeares since) can very well remember; as also one called Old Anthony, a Butcher who dyed about 12 yeares since.

This Relation I received from Mr: Rich: Wakeman Towne Clearke of Bath; (who hath often heard the said Old Anthony tell this Story) in Michaelmas Terme 1651.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Sharpe, 8 and 49.

⁴⁹ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, Sig A 2 v.

⁵⁰ Thomas Fuller, *The Church-History of Britain* (London: 1655), vi, 334–6; Parry, 272–3; Woolf, *Social Circulation of the Past*, 29 and 62.

⁵¹ Ashmole MS 972, interleaf, f. 311; See also C. H. Josten, *Elias Ashmole* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), v. II, 588.

Ashmole cited no less than four sources for this incident, three tradesmen (two cobblers and a butcher) and the town clerk of Bath.

In addition to these personal witnesses, Ashmole would later compile written evidence as well. He explained that he suspected that this purportedly successful alchemist was William Bird, the prior of Bath Abbey and the monk to whom Thomas Charnock referred in his *Breviary of Natural Philosophy*, which was also reprinted in his *Theatrum*.⁵²

Ashmole did not implicitly trust the claims of alchemists. As he began to study alchemical manuscripts he might compile and publish, he remarked, "But (to this end reviewing the Philosophers) I found that many (assuming that Name) wrote what their Fancies, not their Hands had wrought." Ashmole said that even Sir George Ripley, perhaps England's most celebrated alchemist, had been forced to retreat from his claim that he had accomplished the great goal of "Projection." Recognizing that he could do greater harm than good to the reputation of the tradition, "lest I should adde to the many Injuries the World has already suffered, by delivering the bare Medley of my Dubious Apprehensions, without the confident Attestations of Practise."⁵³

Working with original manuscripts posed new problems though. He said, "the Feare of not meeting with, or obtaining the Originall Manuscripts, or Authentique Copies of this Nature, (which I knew to be in some Mens hands, yet wanting them my selfe,) shrewdly beset, though nothing discouraged me: yet was I therewith freely and plentifully supplied by some worthy and intimate Friends, whom I would gladly here mention, but that I well knew they delight not to see their Names in Print."⁵⁴ In this explanation we see the almost conflicting roles and work of antiquaries and alchemists. Graham Parry has noted how antiquaries were an open, collaborative and multigenerational community to themselves throughout the seventeenth century: "Antiquarianism was for the most part a co-operative endeavour: the older ones fostered the younger ones. . . ."⁵⁵ Alchemists, however, relied upon and perhaps even expected their work to be discreet.

⁵² Josten, v. II, 588, n. 5.

⁵³ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, Sig. B 2 r.-v.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Sig. B 2 v.

⁵⁵ Parry, 6; see also Miller, *Peiresc's Europe*, esp. chapter 2, 49-75; Daniel Woolf, *Social Circulation of the Past*, ch. 5 "Varieties of Antiquarianism," esp. 154-63; Krzysztof Pomian *Collectors and Curiosities*, trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 38 and ch. 5, 139-68; Anthony Grafton, "Jean Hardouin: The Antiquary as Pariah" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 62 (1999): 241-67, esp. 262-67.

Ashmole seemed to delight in exposing these mysterious alchemical manuscripts for public consumption knowing all the while their secrets would remain intact from all but the worthy and knowledgeable adepts.

Furthermore, Ashmole understood that each manuscript had been written at a particular historical moment. Once obtained, he said, "My Care was next to dispose them in such a Series as might be answerable to the Respective Times, wherein each Author Flourished."⁵⁶ He even prepared his audience for language that would seem "Irkesome and Uncouth." English itself, he explained, had undergone vast changes. Even spellings, he said had changed "or uncouth Words as strangely ridiculous, as a Maunch, Hood, Cod-piece, or Trunk hose, know; as they were the fashionable Attires, so these the usuall Dialects of those Times."⁵⁷

Ashmole knew that languages were cultural and historical artifacts and if read as such, allowed more profound understandings and appreciations of the past: "For we must consider that Languages which are daily used in our Discourse, are in as continuall Mutation: what Custome brings into habit, is best lik'd for the Present, whether it be to revive what is lost, or introduce something new; or to piece up the present, with the retained shreds of what preceded. . . ."⁵⁸

Mindful of his boundaries, Ashmole declared "My Annotations are limited within the Bounds of what is Historicall, or what occasionally must needs intrench on the Confines of other Arts, and all Glosses upon the Philosophicall Worke purposely omitted. . . ."⁵⁹ His *Annotations* were essentially a précis on the antiquarian approach to alchemy: He restricted his inquiries solely to what he could confirm historically recognizing that he might have to move into other fields, avoiding always philosophical inquiries.

There were pitfalls for the individual intent on uncovering lost or hidden alchemical secrets. Ashmole believed Thomas Norton must have known that learned individuals always risked using inaccurately copied texts. Perhaps unduly confident in the accuracy of printed texts, Ashmole explained that Norton had lived before the printing press had arrived in England and was therefore subject to scribal errors that succeeding generations had been spared.⁶⁰ Printed along the margin of the text, he noted that

⁵⁶ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, Sig. B 2 v.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 30–1. Cf. Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 113–26.

in 1471 Symon Islip built the first printing press in England in Westminster Abbey and William Caxton was the printer. He even cited his source. When he referred to the specific page in John Stow's *Survey of London* (1598), as he did throughout the *Annotations*, it appeared in the margin as "Stowes Surv. 525."⁶¹

Yet even writing down, let alone publishing this secret knowledge had potent implications. Ashmole explained that Norton's "Master" invited him to come personally because he was under oath not to discuss their secrets in writing. He said that Norton feared if his writings came "to the view of such whose Eyes were not worthy the perusal of so sublime Secrets, and thereby suffer under the contempt of the prophane Vulgar, or by wicked men be abused to wickedness."⁶² It was precisely for these reasons that alchemical texts needed to be veiled with secret codes, accessible only to those appropriately knowledgeable of their secrets.⁶³

Those secrets might be held in manuscripts but they were also hidden in artifacts, particularly sigils. Sigils were usually but not necessarily rings which were cast at astrologically advantageous moments, purportedly capturing the power of the heavens within the metal itself.⁶⁴ They possessed the necessary magic to accomplish mundane tasks such as winning at cards, winning a court case or escaping arrest. Sigils were also believed to provide their owners with immunity in battle, invisibility or protection from vermin and lightening.⁶⁵ As we might expect, Ashmole provided a history of sigils, noting that "Apolonous Tyaneus was the mightiest, and his Workes (in my Opinion) most Stupendious. . . ."⁶⁶

Ashmole concurred with the received wisdom that sigils were essentially microcosms of the universe, possessing within their inscribed metals the power of the universe itself and again, provided his source: Oswald Croll's *De Signaturis internis rerum* (1609) or, as he noted in his margin, "Crolius de signat. inter. rerum." "As for the use of such Characters, Let-

⁶¹ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, 439.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 341–42 and *passim*.

⁶⁴ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 231. Fred Gettings, *Dictionary of Occult, Hermetic and Alchemical Sigils* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 7.

⁶⁵ Thomas, 231. See also Lauren Kassell, "The Economy of Magic in Early Modern England" in *The Practice of Reform in Health, Medicine, and Science, 1500–2000*, ed. Margaret Pelling and Scott Mandelbrote (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 43–57, esp. 54–57.

⁶⁶ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, 463.

ters, Words, Figures, &c. Formed or Insculped upon any Matter we make use of, we are led to it by the president of Nature, who Stampes most notable and marvelous Figures upon Plant Rootes, Seeds, Fruits, nay even upon rude Stones, Flints, and other inferiour Bodies.”⁶⁷ Ashmole seemed to blur the line between artifacts and nature, suggesting that nature herself bore secret stamps on roots, seeds, fruits and rocks—though he never claimed to be able to decipher or comprehend such knowledge. He also explained that the power of sigils was providential: “Nor are these remarkable Signatures made and described by Chaunce, (for there is a certaine Providence which leades on all things to their end, and which makes nothing but to some purpose,) but are the Characters and Figures of those Starrs, by whom they are principally governed, and with these particular Stamps, have also peculiar and different vertues bestowed upon them.”⁶⁸

Sigils were not the only artifacts that Ashmole documented. He wove threads of the alchemical tradition into a discussion of English history and numismatics—another subject in which he took great pride in his expertise.⁶⁹ In the *Ordinall of Alchimy*, Norton referred in passing to a change in the English coinage system, “when the chaunge of Coyne was had.”⁷⁰ Citing Stow’s *Annals of England*, Ashmole described how in 1465 Edward IV had prescribed new gold alloys for his realm.⁷¹ With meticulous attention to historical and alchemical sources, he constructed a narrative history that legitimized the alchemical tradition.

After a brief explanation of the new gold alloys that Edward IV required, he argued that the inscription, “Iesus autem transiens per medium eorum ibat,” could be read, albeit creatively, as “Jesus passed invisible and in most secret manner by the midst of Pharisees.” This statement confirmed for Ashmole that, “Gold was made by invisible and secret Art amidst the Ignorant.”⁷² Again, however, we see both the credulity of the devotee colliding with the critical sensibilities of the antiquary, in this instance, overriding them. In an almost breathtaking integration of belief and verifiable evidence, Ashmole described how England owed its coinage to the alchemist Raymond Lull:

⁶⁷ Ibid., 463–4.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 464.

⁶⁹ Hunter, *Ashmole*, 19.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁷¹ Ibid., 442. See John Stow, *The Annales, Or Generall Chronicle of England* (London: Impensis Thomae Adams, 1615), 418.

⁷² Ashmole, *Theatrum*, 442–3.

Mayerus [Michael Maier] confirms this, and saith (k) Raymond [Lull] made most pure Gold in the Tower . . . some of which himself had seen. Tis also worth observing that (l) there was no Gold coyned in England before the said Edward the third's Reigne An. 1443. & Raymond Lully was long in England before that, for (m) An. 1332 he wrote his Testamentum Novissimum in St. Katherins [sic] Church neere the Tower of London, and Dedicated it (with other of his Workes) to Edward the third, and it may be presumed he was some while there before he wrote the same: For, that he was brought over by Cremer Abbot of Westminster, afterwards made knowne to the King, and did furnish him with much Gold, as shall appeare hereafter in the Annotations upon Hermes Bird.⁷³

The credibility of this passage lay in Ashmole's documentation. The parenthetical letters, "(k)," "(l)," "(m)" directed readers to printed marginal notes of Michael Maier's *Symbola aureae mensae duodecim nationum* (1617). Maier, (1568–1622) was an alchemist in the Holy Roman Empire who published several alchemical volumes. Ashmole owned the *Symbola* and cited it throughout his *Annotations*. He also referred to Camden's *Britannia* and Raymond Lull's *Testamentum Novissimum*. Turning to his discussion of Lull's purported alchemical text, "Hermes Bird," Ashmole cited Stow's *Annals of England* and referred again to the abbot of Westminster, Cremer, identifying him as an eye witness to this account ("Vide testament. Cremeri.")⁷⁴ Ashmole explained that Cremer met Lull while traveling in Italy and persuaded him to join him in his return to England. Two years after his arrival, and after thirty years of failure, Cremer successfully "obteyned the Secret from him."⁷⁵ Cremer introduced Lull to Edward III and Lull agreed to fund a campaign against the Turks but not against Christians. Edward agreed to this arrangement and promptly launched his forces against France, whereupon Lull refused to work for the dishonest English king. Lull of course found himself imprisoned in the Tower, from which he eventually escaped to France, in the words of Ashmole, "where in all probability he pen'd this Piece."⁷⁶

⁷³ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, 443.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 467.

⁷⁵ Ibid. "Abbot Cremer, believed to have been an alchemist, is an apocryphal figure." M.K. Corbett, 333. Lauren Kassell has noted that "From Dee to Newton the existence of the philosophers' stone was supported by eye-witness testimony." Kassell, *supra* n. 14, 147.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 467.

The point is not whether Edward III tried to fund his campaign against the French with Lullian gold, still less is it if there ever was any Lullian gold. Ashmole could summon a host of highly regarded historical sources and references for his discussion. Questions and doubts of the alchemical tradition would surely wither and collapse when confronted with such impressive sources with such impeccable credentials.

Credentials were one thing but what concerned Ashmole just as much was the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. He placed the authors of his collected alchemical manuscripts within the context of English culture and history as Camden had done with artifacts and English history.⁷⁷

Buried in the verse of Thomas Norton's *Ordinall of Alchimy* were historical references, some of which could be verified and others that could at least be plausibly identified. Ashmole said that Norton's cryptic line: "I made also the Elixer of life, / Which me bereft a Merchaunt's wife:" was verified by a contemporary of Norton. The reference to the wife suggested the merchant to be William Cannings, the five-time mayor of Bristol who was so wealthy his family could afford to endow their parish with a large stained glass image of Saint Mary of Radcliff. Furthermore, the church was notable in its own right, possessing "a Stately ascent upon many Staires," a high, arched roof of stone and a steeple that Ashmole believed was the tallest one he had seen in England.⁷⁸

Other references were more clearly verifiable. When Norton later remarked in his alchemical poem, "Herbert dyed soone after in his bed, / And Delvis at Teuxbury lost his head" Ashmole explained that this was certainly a reference to the retributions Edward IV exacted after his victory at Tewkesbury over Henry VI which brought an end to the Wars of the Roses.⁷⁹

Verification also required Ashmole to acquire or at least examine as many copies of a single manuscript as he possibly could. When he described an incident involving Norton's *Ordinall of Alchimy*, he said, "In the search I have made after Authentique Manuscripts to compleate this Worke, a private Gentleman lent me a very faire one of Norton's *Ordinall*, which I chiefly followed; yet not admitting to compare it with fourteen other Cop-

⁷⁷ William B. Ashworth, Jr., "Natural History and the Emblematic World View" in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 320–1.

⁷⁸ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, 441–2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 442.

ies.”⁸⁰ This was not unusual. He made a similar remark about Sir George Ripley’s *Compound of Alchymie*:

This Worke (which is also called the Twelve Gates) was pen’d by Sir George Ripley . . . I have compared it with several other Manuscript Copies, amongst which I happily met with one written neere about the time that Ripley lived, (and in these Streames of Learning the more clearest and without the least of Mixture is to be found nearest the Spring-head,) the which I most relied upon.⁸¹

He complained that in Philemon Holland’s 1610 translation of Camden’s *Britannia*, Holland had taken liberties to say that Ripley’s birthplace was the village of Ripley in Surrey county and called Ripley “a Ring-leader of our Alchemists, and a mysticall Imposter.”⁸² While Ashmole could forgive Holland for impugning the alchemical tradition—it had always had its critics—what could not pass unnoticed was the inaccuracy suggested in Ripley’s birthplace: “No certainly, his Name, Relation, and Kindred discover him to be the Sonne of a Gentleman; and though I cannot exhibite his Pedigree, yet it appeares in some ancient Manuscript Copies of his Medulla (which I have seene) that his Relation of Kindred, Gentlemen of ‘Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, as Tevarsall, Ripley. . . .’”⁸³

Holland’s question of Ripley’s birthplace was all the more alarming because neither Camden nor any other source questioned Ripley’s birthplace. With an uncharacteristic sneer, Ashmole remarked, “I cannot but wonder at the Boldnesse of this Translator” and after his imputation of Ripley “ingenious Schollars might have just cause to question the Candidnesse of his Pen in other things.” With a final derisive remark, Ashmole said that Holland inserted exaggerations in Camden’s *Britannia* at other points as well. Camden had said the village of Banbury was famous for its cheese but Holland “addes Cakes and Zeale: Neither of which are to be found in the Original. . . .”⁸⁴

However, exaggeration was not nearly as menacing to the integrity of the alchemical tradition as its two ogres, credulity and avarice. Turning to texts that appeared in his *Theatrum*, Chaucer’s “Chanon Yeoman’s Tale,” Norton’s “Ordinall of Alchemie,” and those by George Ripley, William

⁸⁰ Ibid., 455. Emphasis added.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 457.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Bloomefield and Richard Carpenter, Ashmole attacked the unwarranted credulity of some alchemists: “I wish I could say this Age, this Nation, the World, were not alured [sic] and infected with the Cyrene notes of some grand, and notable Imposters, or that the too too [sic] Credulous had not met with the same misfortune which Story tells us others have undergone, even to Ruine.”⁸⁵ If, however, one engaged in the endeavor for gold and gold alone, then “certainly the lucre of that will fix a Curse upon their Endeavours, and plunge them headlong into an unfathom’d depth of Misfortune.”⁸⁶ For Ashmole, the veracity of the alchemical tradition lay in part in the goals of individual alchemists. If those goals departed from the noble ones he and his fellow occultists had outlined, no greater damage to its integrity could be done. Apparently the goals and the credibility of individual alchemists were indistinguishable to Ashmole.⁸⁷

As powerful as these antiquarian demands were to him, credulity was also a consideration, especially when he turned his attention to the most celebrated alchemists in the English tradition he chronicled, Edward Kelley and John Dee. Ashmole began his discussion of Kelley with, for him perhaps, an eminently appropriate point of reference: Kelley’s astrological nativity. Ashmole assumed that his ability to read the heavens allowed one—or at least him—to discern aspects of the life of Edward Kelley that the surviving historical record would not reveal. For Ashmole, historical sources comprised a vast body of evidence, including astrological nativities. Accordingly, Kelley’s life was misunderstood by many, “which the Dragons Tayle in the Ascendant, was at all times ready to further and promote, and from whose Position the Nature of those abusive Aspersions may be (Generally) gathered: and partly from a story which Wever [sic] in his Funerall Monuments infers. . . .”⁸⁸

When Ashmole turned to Dee he was even more star struck. He said that Dee’s library boasted “4000 Books and 700 of them Manuscripts.” Dee’s bibliographers, Julian Roberts and Andrew Watson, arrived at a smaller but still impressive number: 3000 printed volumes but less than 500 manuscripts while Dee himself claimed to have 3000 books and 1000 manuscripts.⁸⁹ Whatever number of volumes Dee possessed, Ashmole described their work with an almost palpable sense of awe:

⁸⁵ Ibid., 469.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 468–69, in passim, esp. 469.

⁸⁷ Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 241.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 479–80.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 480. *John Dee’s Library Catalogue*, ed. Julian Roberts and Andrew G. Watson (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1990), 22.

now shall I give the Reader an Account of their joynt Actions abroad, as also what relates to Doctor Dee after his returne into England: which I shall doe from an unquestionable Authority, even Doctor Dee's Diary, all written with his owne hand; where I shall take the larger Field to walke in, because I move upon so certaine ground: some of which passages may please (if not concerne) the Reader. For I think it not fit to suffer such Eminent lights longer to lie in Obscurity, without bringing them forth to the view of the World.⁹⁰

He called his source, "an unquestionable Authority, even Doctor Dee's Diary, all written with his owne hand."⁹¹ This time, however, there were no cross references to confirm or deny the travels and work of Kelley and Dee of the sort he had provided for lesser lights in the alchemical constellation he had identified and mapped.⁹² This diary—different from the manuscript he would possess twenty years later—would stand on its own.⁹³

* * *

When Ashmole published his last alchemical text, an anonymous manuscript entitled, *The Way to Blisse* in 1658, he did so apparently for purely antiquarian reasons. After having completed his *Theatrum* in 1652, he thought he would publish a second collection of English alchemical treatises. He never completed that project and blamed a series of lawsuits brought against him in the following years for preventing him from focusing on his true interests.⁹⁴ Instead, however, he brought one final alchemical manuscript into print.

In his prefatory address "To The Reader," Ashmole informed his audience that he had encountered a copy of this manuscript and "found it mutilated with many Imperfections, much injured by several incongruous Additions, and they confest to be onely made up of some scattered Shreds

⁹⁰ Ibid., 481.

⁹¹ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, 481.

⁹² The problems this decision posed are examined in Jan Backlund, "In the Footsteps of Edward Kelley" in *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought*, *supra* n. 10, 295–330, esp. 295, 297 and 300–2.

⁹³ Ashmole's source is problematic. He printed dates in the margins that occasionally can be correlated with Dee's diaries but not consistently enough to be certain that we have exactly the same sources Ashmole had. Of the seventeen dates that Ashmole cites, six can be correlated with the extant diaries. See James Orchard Halliwell, ed., *The Private Diary of Dr. John Dee* (London: The Camden Society, 1842) and Edward Fenton, ed., *The Diaries of John Dee* (Oxfordshire: Day Books, 1998).

⁹⁴ Josten, v. 1, 90–1.

and Fragments, collected from the whole Work; . . .”⁹⁵ He compared this copy to one that he had and decided to publish his manuscript for several reasons. First, he explained that between “the Zeal I have for this noble Science,” and the regret he believed would ensue if this “Champion” was not publicly honored, he saw it through publication. Later he plaintively remarked that he published this text because, “I can modestly averr, that my Copy was a Transcript of that Original.”⁹⁶

CODA

In 1660, Ashmole presented his three alchemical volumes to the newly restored Stuart monarch, Charles II.⁹⁷ Charles was fond of chemical and alchemical studies, even returning to England with an alchemist, Nicaise Le Fèvre, in tow.⁹⁸ Ashmole had carried himself deftly enough to survive the 1640s and 1650s as a royalist and was rewarded by being bestowed Windsor Herald by Charles II, an office which provided him with the opportunity and access to documentation and sources to produce his magnificent heraldic history, *The Institution, Laws & Ceremonies of the most Noble Order Of The Garter* (1672). This volume was then and remains today one of his most well known publications.⁹⁹

On one level, such a volume may seem far removed from his esoteric alchemical studies but perhaps unsurprisingly, Ashmole, and certainly his readers, would have seen many similarities. Heraldry, like alchemy and natural magic, was deeply concerned with the hidden significance of symbols, the importance of hierarchy and proper, legitimate lineage.¹⁰⁰ Ashmole’s search for the provenance of alchemical manuscripts served him well when he was asked to trace and record the protocol of the Order of the Garter. He spent much of the next twelve years visiting parish churches to record inscriptions and coats of arms, meeting with nobles and those who claimed to be noble in taverns and in the new and ever more popular coffee houses,

⁹⁵ Elias Ashmole, *The Way to Blisse* (London: Printed by John Grismond for Nath. Brook, at the Angel in Corn-hill, 1658), “To The Reader,” n.p.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Josten, v. II, 787.

⁹⁸ J. Andrew Mendelsohn, “Alchemy and Politics in England, 1649–1660” *Past and Present* 135 (1992): 30–78, esp. 30.

⁹⁹ Elias Ashmole, *The Institution, Laws & Ceremonies of the most Noble Order Of The Garter* (London: Printed by J. Macock, for Nathanael Brooke at the Angel in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange, 1672). Hunter, *Ashmole*, 11–18.

¹⁰⁰ Hunter, *Ashmole*, 11–12.

collecting documentation of family lineages, eventually publishing his compendium in 1672. Indeed, his insistence on needing original documentation to substantiate alchemical claims continued when he tried to confirm heraldic aspirations.¹⁰¹ This volume represents untold effort and expense and is a testament to his industry and devotion to precision and accuracy.¹⁰² His interests in the occult and heraldry continued for the rest of his long life. He sketched coats of arms in his personal copy of the *Theatrum* and copied letters sent to him about legendary alchemical figures until nearly the end of his life in 1692 and long after the book had been published.¹⁰³

In the maelstrom of political rebellion and the new philosophies and beliefs that swirled throughout the intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century, it is never easy or perhaps even desirable to draw clear distinctions between natural philosophy, natural history and antiquarianism—surely Ashmole did not. The occult tradition and the philosophical revolution of the seventeenth century were creating new intellectual alloys. In his antiquarian/alchemical studies, our virtuoso was almost creating a new genre, something that lay in the interstices between the lines of belief and verifiable events. He took great pains to study the lineage and inspect and criticize the history of his alchemical tradition. Both an antiquary and an adept, Ashmole knew England's alchemical history and documented the tradition to establish the veracity and the legitimacy of the work. That was why he wrote the following in the *Prolegomena* to his *Theatrum*:

Wherefore you that love to converse with the Dead, or consult their Monuments, draw near: perhaps you may find more benefit in them, then the Living; There you may meet with the Genii of our Hermetique Philosophers, learne the Language in which they woo'd and courted Dame Nature, and enjoy them more freely, and at Greater Command, (to satisfie your Doubts) then when they were in the Flesh; For, they have Written more then they would Speake; and left their Lines so Rich, as if they had dissolved Gold in their Inke, and clad their Words with the Sovereign Moysture.¹⁰⁴

The notable antiquary, John Selden (1584–1654) thought of the search for knowledge as moving from one isle to the next, “so that every one hath so

¹⁰¹ Daniel Woolf, *Social Circulation*, 107.

¹⁰² See Josten, v. III in *passim*.

¹⁰³ Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ashmole MS 972.

¹⁰⁴ Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum Prolegomena*, n.p.

much relation to some other, that it hath not only use often of the aide of what is next it, but, through that, also of what is out of ken to it.”¹⁰⁵ Surely other antiquaries, other virtuosi, shared such a perception, clearly Ashmole among them. He thought the antiquities of England’s distant, often mysterious past were closer to the world of mercury, sulfur and complex, coded recipes than his peers may have realized or admitted and he believed that alchemy resided among the ruins, artifacts, records, charters and seals of the antiquaries.

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¹⁰⁵ Woolf, *Idea of History*, 214.

И

Stoic Constructions of Virtue in The Vicar of Wakefield

Margaret Anderson

In R. S. Crane's seminal essay "Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling'," he locates the origins of eighteenth-century sentimentalism in the seventeenth-century rejection of Stoic indifference. Crane quotes an anonymous writer from 1755 who questions "whether those are properly men, who never weep upon any occasion. They may pretend to be as heroical as they please, and pride themselves in a stoical insensibility; but this will never pass for virtue with the true judges of human nature. What can be more nobly human than to have a tender sentimental feeling of our own and other's [sic] misfortunes?"¹ Critics ever since have traced the anti-Stoic features in eighteenth-century theories of sentiment.² The Stoics, to be sure, were renowned for positing the extirpation of the passions as essential to the virtuous life, while proponents of sensibility, Crane argues, identified "virtue with acts of benevolence and still more with feelings of universal good-will which inspire and accompany these acts."³ He cites the eighteenth-century moral philosopher David Fordyce, who claimed that the man of feeling's benevolence prompts him to "shar[e] in the Joys of others

¹ R. S. Crane, "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" *English Literary History* 1 (1934): 206.

² See Henry W. Sams, "Anti-Stoicism in Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England" *Studies in Philology*, 41 (1944), 65–78; and Donald Greene, "Latitudinarianism and Sensibility: The Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling' Reconsidered," *Modern Philology* 75 (1977): 159–83.

³ Crane, 206.

by Rebound,” regarding their good as his own. Fordyce admits that such “friendly Sympathy with others subjects [the man of feeling] to some Pains which the hard-hearted Wretch does not feel,” but without sympathy, he would not be moved to virtuous action.⁴ Stoicism and sensibility thus seem antithetical, and critics have generally treated them as such, for although Crane’s analysis has provoked further investigation, not many have questioned the period’s antipathy to the Stoic creed.⁵ My aim here is to offer a more positive account of the relationship between Stoic and sentimental ethics and to show how the Stoic construction of virtue in Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) constitutes a rigorous and, more importantly, a practical and sustainable social ideal.

While literary historians have turned their attention to the broader scope of Stoicism’s legacy in eighteenth-century literature, only a few scholars have challenged Crane’s account of sensibility’s response to Stoic doctrines on the passions.⁶ Julie Ellison, notably, suggests that “in republican discourse, sensibility and stoicism line up on the same side,” and Brian Michael Norton points out that “the values of affective sentiment and Stoic impassiveness were in no way incompatible in eighteenth-century thought.”⁷ My contribution to this field of inquiry begins with an eighteenth-century articulation of the tension between Stoic and sentimental ethics, a passage from Samuel Johnson that highlights the opposition, and affinity, between them. This discussion leads me to reform the conception of sensibility’s antipathy to Stoicism that Crane inaugurated and such recent critics as G. J. Barker-Benfield have confirmed.⁸ In turning to *The Vicar of Wakefield*, I show how Goldsmith holds virtue to Stoic standards.

In *Rambler* 99, Johnson examines a point on which Stoic, sentimental, and even Christian, doctrines converge: “To love all men is our duty.” He immediately distinguishes the sentimental and Christian prescription from the Stoic by asserting what this duty consists in: “a general habit of benevo-

⁴ Crane, 205.

⁵ See Julie Ellison, *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁶ See Geoffrey Sill, *The Cure of the Passions and the Origins of the English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Lois Agnew, “The Stoic Temper in Belletristic Rhetoric,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 33 (2003): 69–88; Edward Andrew, “The Senecan Moment: Patronage and Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century,” *JHI* 65 (2004): 277–99.

⁷ Ellison, 36; Brian Michael Norton, “The Moral in Phutatorius’s Breeches: Tristram Shandy and the Limits of Stoic Ethics,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 18 (2006), 407.

⁸ G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility. Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1992).

lence, and readiness of occasional kindness”—the defining characteristic of such renowned men of feeling as Laurence Sterne’s Yorick and Henry Mackenzie’s Harley. Johnson extends the range of this duty no further because, he proposes, “to love all equally is impossible; at least impossible without the extinction of those passions which now produce all our pains and pleasures . . . and the suppression of all our hopes and fears in apathy and indifference.” Only a Stoic, Johnson thinks, could love everyone equally—an impractical ideal because it requires a degree of impartiality and indifference that human nature precludes. As such, his distinction between the sentimental and Stoic positions does not oppose them so much as present the one as a less extreme, more realistic version of the other. The man of feeling is selflessly disposed to sympathy and kindness as occasion warrants, while the Stoic’s sense of duty applies in every circumstance, requiring the inhuman temperament of sympathizing no more with one person than with another. Indeed, Marcus Aurelius’s dictum, to “Love mankind,” entails treating everyone “with Benevolence and Justice, according to the natural Law of Fellowship.”⁹ This latter construction of virtue is too rigorous, Johnson contends, for “Of all our countrymen which do we love most, those whom we know, or those whom we know not? And of those whom we know which do we cherish most, our friends or our enemies? And of our friends, which are the dearest to us, those who are related to us, or those who are not?” Even if we were capable of such equipoise, our “affections, not compressed into a narrower compass, would vanish like elemental fire, in boundless evaporation.”¹⁰ Such affections would benefit no one.

Johnson’s incredulity seems to fit into the tradition of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century anti-Stoicism that has become a critical commonplace. Yet his complaint reveals the actual nature of Stoicism’s excessiveness: in prescribing that one love all equally, the Stoics were not eradicating emotion per se so much as countermanding the dictates of self-interest, which would have one be prudent and limit the degree to which one assists others. With his undifferentiated, all-encompassing affection, the danger the Stoic sage faced, Johnson suggests, is that his benevolence would be rendered insubstantial and, indeed, equivalent to apathy, or not helping at all. As such, the Stoic sage encounters a difficulty analogous to the one that the

⁹ Marcus Aurelius, *The Commentaries of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus*, trans. James Thomson (1747), 40.

¹⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 4: 166.

man of feeling faces when his means are insufficient to aid everyone to whom his goodwill extends. Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), for instance, present their heroes in such a predicament, for although Harley and Yorick seem capable of universal sympathy, the paucity of their fortunes constrains their benevolence. Even with a more reasonable conception of one's duty, sentimentalism still faced the problem of how to sustain virtue.

THE STOIC INHERITANCE

Although Stoic benevolence seemed the least supportable model, it was also the most exacting and therefore presented a social ideal that informed many eighteenth-century conceptions of disinterest. As my reading of *The Vicar of Wakefield* will demonstrate, Goldsmith draws on Stoic constructions of virtue to make disinterested benevolence sustainable. To Goldsmith and others, the same tenets that rendered the Stoic model impractical also constituted its appeal, because the Stoics, in advocating boundless, impartial sympathy, offered the strongest opposition to theories of self-interest. In response to such doctrines as those advanced by Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville, who argued for the primacy of self-interest and its reconciliation with virtue, many eighteenth-century moral philosophers emphasized the disinterested nature of moral affection as the Stoics construed it.¹¹ For example, Francis Hutcheson, who translated Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, describes the Stoic virtue when he declares "the calm, stable, universal good-will to all, or the most extensive benevolence" as "that disposition . . . which is most excellent." And when Adam Smith directs us to acquire the perspective of an impartial spectator, he recommends the equanimity of a Stoic sage.¹² This is not to say that their ethics endorsed Stoic views without qualification, but rather to consider briefly how theorists of sentiment positioned themselves vis-à-vis the ancient philosophy's virtuous ideal. Smith, who examines Stoicism at length in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), calls it a "most artificial and refined education . . . which can correct the inequalities of our . . . feelings," but he promotes

¹¹ For the Stoic account of self-interest and its influence in eighteenth-century philosophy, see Pierre Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 57–90.

¹² Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy* (1755), 421; Joseph Butler, Sermon XII, repr. in Selby-Bigge, 240; Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (1790, repr. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 25.

“the poets and romance writers, who best paint the refinements and delicacies of love and friendship,” including “Racine and Voltaire; Richardson, Marivaux, and Riccoboni,” as “much better instructors than Zeno, Chrysippus, or Epictetus,” because the former more successfully overcome our self-interest and inspire sympathy for those with whom we have neither connection nor acquaintance.

The Stoics, Smith acknowledges, are after all right to contend that “All men, even those at the greatest distance, are . . . entitled to our good wishes, and,” he adds, “our good wishes we naturally give them.” Yet we are “little interested . . . in the fortune of those . . . who are . . . very remote from us” in geography or experience. From these “our interests are altogether separated and detached . . . so that there is neither connexion nor competition between them;” hence, “we do not always think it so necessary to restrain either our . . . anxiety about our own affairs, or our . . . indifference about those of other men.” In such cases, loving all equally seems pointless. Even if we were impartial, “to what purpose should we trouble ourselves about the world in a moon,” since our lack of “acquaintance or connexion” prevents our actions from being of “any . . . advantage to them.”¹³ Smith locates the limits of sympathy, and its benefits, at the extent of our acquaintance and connections: how can we really concern ourselves about anyone who is entirely unknown to us, let alone with equal consideration as those who are near and dear? In order to realize the Stoic ideal, it seems, one needs to be acquainted with or connected to everyone.

Hutcheson drew on the Stoic account of the interconnectedness of humankind to argue nothing less. Pointing to such instances in which the “Understanding and Affections in Children . . . make them appear moral Agents,” Hutcheson followed Cicero’s description of the Stoic view, which identifies a parent’s concern for his offspring as the starting point of our natural sociability, and proposed, “may not this be a Foundation of weaker degrees of Love where there is no preceding tie of Parentage and extend it to all Mankind?” In fact, Hutcheson suggested, “had we any Notions of rational Agents, capable of moral Affections, in the most distant Planets, our good Wishes would still extend to them.”¹⁴ This love, to be sure, is weaker than our concern for individuals, but the difference, in Hutcheson’s analysis, is one of reference: our love for all mankind entails the “consideration of the most extensive system,” not anyone in particular. Only if “we

¹³ Smith, 135–40.

¹⁴ Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* II.ii.10 (1726, repr. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004), 114–15.

... refer all our calm particular kind affections to the general extensive benevolence” do we approach the disinterest of universal sympathy.¹⁵ The Stoics themselves had begun with the individual’s concern for another and extended this fellow-feeling to all of mankind so that we might, Smith explains, “view ourselves not in the light in which our own selfish passions are apt to place us, but in the light in which any other citizen of the world would view us.”¹⁶ They envisioned the actual process of extension in terms of ever-widening circles, an image that Alexander Pope invokes in his discussion of how to overcome self-interest, how the “human soul/ Must rise from Individual to the Whole”

As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre mov’d, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads,
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,
His country next, and next all human race

are encompassed by the individual’s sympathy.¹⁷ The center is “mov’d,” so that virtue’s frame of reference is not the self, but rather “all human race.” It was this shift—away from self-interest—that would make our ties to others benevolent.

Such bonds were altogether different from those of commerce and society, as Hobbes and Mandeville had theorized them. These were aimed at individual profit, not universal sympathy, and so in adopting the principles that constituted the Stoic ideal of virtue, and rejecting self-interest, such eighteenth-century philosophers as Adam Ferguson endeavored to reform society along Stoic lines: Ferguson claims, citing Epictetus for confirmation, that “A person of an affectionate mind, possessed of a maxim, That he himself, as an individual, is no more than a part of the whole that demands his regard, has found, in that principle, a sufficient foundation for all the virtues . . . for an equal contempt of danger or pain, that come to stop his

¹⁵ Hutcheson, 11.

¹⁶ Smith, 140–41.

¹⁷ Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, Epistle IV. 361–68, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 546. See Cicero, *De finibus*, Book 3, and Stobaeus’s *Gnomologia graecolatina* 4.671,7–673,11 for the Stoic account. Adam Portkay cites other eighteenth-century echoes of the Stoic vision in *The Passion for Happiness: Samuel Johnson and David Hume* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 109–11.

pursuits of public good.”¹⁸ And the natural law theorist Richard Cumberland praises the Stoics for asserting that, “As a Citizen of the World, and a part of the whole, Man is oblig’d to have no private Self-Interest, or Advantage;” he “should have no Motions nor desire any Thing, but with respect to the whole; to direct his whole Endeavour to the common Good, and to abstain from the contrary.”¹⁹ This kind of public service belongs to the tradition of civic humanism, and James P. Carson points out that Goldsmith endorses a “classical republicanism in which the autonomous citizen demonstrate[s] his virtue.”²⁰ But the Stoic model does not require any means—including property—for virtuous activity, and so disinterest becomes an ideal that all citizens, no matter what their station in life, can demonstrate.²¹

Indeed, the Stoics maintained that virtue is self-sufficient, since it is an end in itself. Seneca explains, in Thomas Lodge’s 1614 translation: “Thou art . . . deceived when thou askest me, what that is for which I require Vertue: for thou seekest for somewhat that is above the chiefest. Thou askest mee what I pretend from Vertue? her selfe: for nothing is better, she is the reward of her selfe.”²² Virtue is thus autonomous to a degree that foregrounds the problem of its sustainability, not only because one must love and assist everyone with impartiality, but also because one has no other aims, not even the material goods that seem so necessary to maintaining one’s ability to help others and are essential for self-preservation. The degree to which such an extravagant ethics might work was a point of great contention, and it was an issue which sentimental fiction, from Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) to Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling*, took up. For many writers held “That there is an intrinsic . . . excellency in moral goodness . . . and that, till conscience is stifled by repeated guilt, we feel an

¹⁸ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767, repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41.

¹⁹ Richard Cumberland, *A Treatise on the Laws of Nature*, trans. John Maxwell (1727, repr. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 71.

²⁰ James P. Carson, “‘The Little Republic’ of the Family: Goldsmith’s Politics of Nostalgia,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 16 (2004): 174. See also J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

²¹ See Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, in *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, Ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 4:101. Cited hereafter as *Vicar*.

²² Seneca, *The Workes of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, both morall and naturall containing* (1614), 617. See also Epictetus, *All the Works of Epictetus, which are now extant*, trans. Elizabeth Carter (1758), 319.

obligation to prefer and follow [it] . . . in all cases . . . and generally receive outward advantages, from doing so,” as Elizabeth Carter reasons in the introduction to her 1758 translation of Epictetus. These “are positions which no thinking person can contradict, but it doth not follow . . . that in such a mixture as mankind [moral goodness] is its own sufficient reward.”²³ Goldsmith, like Johnson, shared her admiration for, and reservations about, the Stoic view.

Goldsmith’s library contained several compendia of Greek and Roman philosophy, in addition to Thomas Stanley’s *History of Philosophy* (1655–60), the collected works of Cicero, and those of Seneca. His knowledge of Stoic precepts was extensive, and his interest in the problem of Stoic benevolence already evinced in a piece he wrote for the Royal Magazine seven years before composing *The Vicar of Wakefield*. “The Proceedings of Providence vindicated. An Eastern Tale” (1759) examines the Stoic ideal. Asem, the narrator, retreats from society because, having generously given his wealth away to those in need, he is disappointed that no one repays his benevolence when he is destitute. In other words, Asem learns that virtue is its own reward. One day, while contemplating suicide, he is magically transported to a society in which “Nothing less than universal benevolence is . . . practiced.” The citizens are thus “absolutely without vice” and “never do wrong.” But because they “have only just sufficient to support themselves,” they can relieve no one, not even infirm wretches “in the most deplorable distress.” Like Asem, they are without the means to aid others. Moreover, because their undistinguishing sympathy prevents the inhabitants from fearing or befriending anyone in particular, they are unsociable and ignorant. Asem returns to his own world convinced that the “Ingratitude, contempt, and hatred” from which he suffered was divinely ordained to teach him his duty in a society in which virtue is its own reward. He therefore “applie[s] himself to commerce” and lives happily ever after.²⁴ Self-interest appears necessary for virtue to function at all, for the universal sympathy at work in the imaginary realm Asem visits is as apathetic and unavailing as Johnson suspected Stoic benevolence would be. Yet the reality of Asem’s society is hardly preferable, for it seems that virtue is delimited by material concerns and therefore any claim to disinterest is unsustainable. This impression is standard for critics of any sentimental fiction that professes, in one way or another, that virtue is its own reward.

²³ Epictetus, xvi–xvii.

²⁴ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 3: 65; 61; 65; 66.

Readers and critics have long recognized that the Stoic insistence that virtue is its own reward plays a role of some significance in eighteenth-century British literature, but they have been uncertain about what to make of it. Often enough it is the negative exemplars—the ironization of Stoic fortitude evident in such literary Stoics as Parson Adams in Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and the philosopher in Johnson’s *Rasselas* (1759)—that dominate the modern view, and indicate the unsustainability of the Stoic ideal. Like many other contemporary works, Goldsmith’s novel presents an ethics of benevolence that separates virtue from those circumstances that might determine or delimit it. This separation underscores the problem of sustaining virtue, which is often presented as the vigilance of one’s incorruptibility. Such fortitude is portrayed, in *Pamela* most famously, as virtuous passivity, and in *Joseph Andrews*, as steadfast simplicity. Goldsmith’s achievement, by contrast, is to make virtue active in procuring the common good without compromising its disinterest—an account of Stoic benevolence at work.

CHRISTIANITY OR STOICISM?

My argument that virtue’s triumph in Goldsmith’s novel is Stoic is perhaps surprising given the fact that virtue is materially rewarded, as in other sentimental texts including Richardson’s *Pamela* and Fielding’s *Amelia* (1751). Critics have therefore been skeptical about the claim that virtue is its own reward in these works.²⁵ Of course the novels do not present materialistic concerns as virtue’s motivation; nevertheless, as Lien Chi Altangi notes in Goldsmith’s *The Citizen of the World*, poetic justice dictates that virtue be rewarded, and vice punished.²⁶ This convention seems at odds with the notion that virtue is not determined by material or external conditions. Indeed critics have argued that Richardson’s subtitle, “virtue rewarded,” refers as much to Pamela’s material as to her moral success, and her rise in station and in wealth have been targeted, ever since Fielding’s *Shamela* (1741), as exemplifying the complicity between virtue and self-interest. In short, virtue is limited by the concerns of the material world. This problem is central to

²⁵ See Gillian Skinner, *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel, 1740–1800, The Price of a Tear* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999); and Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁶ Goldsmith, *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 2: 340.

Goldsmith's novel, which invokes a Christian disregard for things of this world and, therefore, manages to save virtue by giving its reward the guise of divine providence. For only by regarding the Vicar's affluence at the end of the novel as part of God's design, it would seem, does the novel resolve the contradiction between Primrose declaring one moment, "I am now raised above this world, and all the pleasures it can produce," and his joyous prosperity a few pages later.²⁷

In any other light, material rewards appear to challenge the entire Stoic model: such rewards imply not only that the virtuous protagonist acts out of self-interest, but also that virtue is not the only, or the greatest, good. This conflict is just one reason critics have found it difficult to imagine that sentimental authors took Stoic tenets seriously. Regarding the vulnerability of Parson Adams' fortitude, for example, Homer Goldberg concludes that "the particular doctrines of rational stoicism, submission to providence, and reliance on grace that Adams has drawn from his reading of classical philosophy and Christian scripture are contravened by his own impulsive humanity."²⁸ And since Adams' good-natured sensibility is typical of sentimental fiction, sensibility does seem to oppose Stoicism, as Crane suggests. The Christian frame of virtue and its reward in *The Vicar of Wakefield* would sharpen this opposition, then, by aligning Christianity with sensibility against Stoicism. Marshall Brown's characterization of the Vicar's "passive submissiveness" as very different from the "muscular fortitude" of a Stoic like Seneca supports such a reading.²⁹ Yet Primrose, like Adams, is often regarded as ironizing the claims of disinterest, universal benevolence, and virtue being its own reward. In other words, the sense that material reward is incompatible with virtue makes even the Christian piety of a vicar seem suspect.

Thomas Preston overstates the case only slightly when he notes that critics tend to present "[Primrose] as a pious fraud who is really a money-conscious, fortune-hunting materialist, practicing benevolence as a good business investment and treating his children as 'annuities for old age'." However, Preston points out, the language of self-interested materialism the Vicar uses does not undermine his virtue; it rather positions him within

²⁷ Goldsmith, *Vicar*, 159.

²⁸ Homer Goldberg, *The Art of "Joseph Andrews"* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 79. See also George E. Haggerty, "Satire and Sentiment in *The Vicar of Wakefield*," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 32 (1991): 25–38 and Richard H. Passon, "Goldsmith and His Vicar: Another Look," *Modern Language Studies* (1973): 59–69.

²⁹ Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 173.

the discourse of Christianity. The novel, therefore, depicts “the Christian’s ‘progress of the soul’ to interior detachment from the world, a progress through which the Vicar . . . stands out as ‘majestic in adversity’.”³⁰ David Durant argues likewise that *The Vicar of Wakefield* is not a sentimental novel that “embarrasses us by rewarding morality with the material goods which morality transcends.” Rather “the same disjunction” between morality and materialism that “undercuts the endings of so many sentimental novels” enables Goldsmith to show that “adherence to Divine standards allows only immaterial rewards; adherence to worldly standards brings only material joy.”³¹ In countering the view that Primrose is a mercenary opportunist, critics thus tend to align the novel with contemporary religious texts that appealed to one’s self-interest in presenting the attractions of the virtuous life. This view is consistent with the Vicar’s profession, to be sure, but it divides the motivation from the demonstration of virtue.

The most telling scene in this regard occurs toward the end of the novel when the Vicar addresses the inmates of the prison into which he is thrown. He informs them that while the Devil “has given you nothing here” and “will give you nothing that’s good hereafter,” if the prisoners become virtuous, their bliss in the next world “shall be unutterable, and still, to crown all, unending.”³² Here, as in the sermons of John Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury, “the great Incitements and Arguments to Piety, are the . . . fear of Punishment, and hopes of Pardon and Rewards.”³³ Faced with the unavoidable punishment of earthly justice, the prisoners might well view “every act of virtue” as “an ingredient into reward,” as the seventeenth-century divine Jeremy Taylor enjoins, and “in every action reflect upon the end; and . . . what [they] propound to [themselves] for a reward” in the afterlife, since no amount of virtue in prison will overturn their sentences.³⁴ Happily, divine justice guarantees virtue its due, if not in this world, then in the next, so that even “the sick, the naked, the houseless, the heavy-laden, and the prisoner” can look forward to rewards.³⁵ Certainly the Vicar, who suffers from all these conditions by the end of the novel, is

³⁰ Thomas R. Preston, “The Uses of Adversity: Worldly Detachment and Heavenly Treasure in *The Vicar of Wakefield*,” *Studies in Philology* 81 (1984): 229–30; 232.

³¹ David Durant, “*The Vicar of Wakefield* and the Sentimental Novel,” *Studies in English Literature* 17 (1977): 491; 484.

³² Goldsmith, *Vicar*, 145; 163.

³³ John Tillotson, *Several discourses upon the attributes of God* (1699), 296.

³⁴ Jeremy Taylor, *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Jeremy Taylor, D. D.* (London: 1844) I: 550; 407.

³⁵ Goldsmith, *Vicar*, 161.

consoled by the prospect of divine justice, and his final indifference to worldly goods has prompted Martin Battestin and James Lehmann, among others, to argue that *The Vicar of Wakefield* is a version of the Job story, not one of virtue compromised.³⁶ Christian patience is, from this perspective, what sustains virtue.

It is Primrose's unswerving faith in divine justice, after all, that enables him to bear his misfortunes like Job. These comprise much of the novel, at the end of which, from his bed of straw, Primrose delivers a sermon on the equal dealings of providence, prompting critics to focus on the Vicar's fortitude, instead of his ambition, as the ethical center of the novel. For both Brown and Durant, this fortitude is manifest in Primrose's submissive, even passive conduct. Durant remarks, "the Vicar is so quick to prove his acceptance of fate that he continually ignores more practical expedients which would obviate the need for submission by avoiding the catastrophes in the first place."³⁷ But his fortitude depends on the Christian realization that this world doesn't matter, so anything else would compromise his virtue. Christian patience thus prompts the passivity Brown mistakenly identifies as Stoic when he observes, "Primrose has a morality . . . a small-minded stoicism that preaches ataraxia on earth as a prelude to epicurean bliss in heaven." In Brown's analysis, "Primrose . . . quotes . . . Seneca's *De Providentia*, with no recognition of the gulf separating his passive submissiveness with the Roman's muscular fortitude," but the Vicar's ordeals traverse this gulf.³⁸

They do so most noticeably on the two occasions when the Vicar forgets his passive submissiveness. The first occurs when Ned Thornhill runs off with Primrose's daughter, Olivia. When Primrose curses Ned, Moses, the Vicar's son, demands, "is this your fortitude?" Next, when George, the eldest son, arrives at the prison in chains and destined for the hangman's noose, Primrose is incensed, whereupon George asks, "Where, Sir, is your fortitude?" In both instances, the Vicar is disposed to action out of concern for another. He declares, "Yes, he [Ned] shall see I have fortitude! Bring me my pistols."³⁹ This vicar is hardly apathetic, and his outrage is less the spontaneous feeling of a Parson Adams or Johnson's Philosopher than the recognition that the equal dealings of providence, although a comfort, do

³⁶ See Martin Battestin, *The Providence of Wit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 193–214; and James A. Lehmann, "The Vicar of Wakefield: Goldsmith's Sublime, Oriental Job," *English Literary History* 46 (1979): 97–121.

³⁷ Durant, 482.

³⁸ Brown, 173.

³⁹ Goldsmith, *Vicar*, 91; 158; 91.

not redress the wrongs of, or constitute justice in, this world. Primrose loses his patience under circumstances that present an active concern for others as a just alternative to Christian passivity: in the first instance, he sets off to recover Olivia and in the second, he supplies the letter that explains George's guilt. While the Job story focuses on divine dispensation, Goldsmith's novel supplements the Christian paradigm with a model of justice in this world, wherein virtue's activity is directed by concern for others, not by attention to one's salvation.

I am not suggesting that Goldsmith prefers Stoicism to Christianity, but rather that his novel upholds the justice of Stoic sociability as a this-worldly counterpart to Christianity's other-worldly judgments. Instead of joining a "small-minded stoicism" with "epicurean bliss," as Brown argues, *The Vicar of Wakefield* connects "the timeless immediacy of events" with "the timeless eternity of judgments" by showing how justice here can correspond to justice in the hereafter.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, divine providence does not become an explanation for injustice in the world; the unfolding of events does not explain "why men should . . . feel pain, why our wretchedness should be requisite in the formation of universal felicity."⁴¹ Justice here may determine reward and punishment, but these are not manifestations of divine judgment. Instead, Goldsmith focuses on what constitutes the common good irrespective of the hereafter. He therefore makes Seneca's assertion, that "the greatest object in the universe . . . is a good man struggling with adversity,"⁴² the condition for justice in this world: "a greater [object]," Primrose insists, "is the good man that comes to relieve [adversity]."⁴³ The good man is one who relieves another without regard for whether his own interest is just, notwithstanding God's design.

VIRTUE'S LIMITS AND THE PROBLEM OF REWARD

When the novel opens, Primrose is in a position to be such a good man, because his fortune of fourteen thousand pounds enables him to confer the profits of his living "to the orphans and widows of the clergy in [his] diocese." However, misfortune quickly ensures the limitation of virtue's means: his fortune is lost and he can no longer afford to feel "a secret

⁴⁰ Brown, 171.

⁴¹ Goldsmith, *Vicar*, 160.

⁴² See Seneca's *De Providentia* 2.8–9.

⁴³ Goldsmith, *Vicar*, 167.

pleasure in doing [his] duty without reward.” Material needs thus appear to circumscribe virtue in a way that limits it and the good it can do, for Primrose’s virtue consists, like Job’s, in doing without. He enjoins his family to “conform to [their] humble situation,” and “without repining, give up those splendours with which numbers are wretched,” to “give up all pretensions to gentility . . . and . . . draw upon content for the deficiencies of fortune.”⁴⁴ In many respects, he aims to be just like the parishioners in his new living, who are “equal strangers to opulence and poverty” and, with “simplicity of manners, and frugal . . . habit[s] . . . scarce kn[ow] that temperance [i]s a virtue.” Primrose succeeds, inasmuch as his family, even in straitened circumstances, participates in many of the same “moral or rural amusements” they had in Wakefield. What signals the limitation of virtue then is not the family’s income, but rather the diminishment of the family itself. Whereas in Wakefield, the Vicar extended his good-will to familial relations “even to the fortieth remove” so that “never was the family of Wakefield known to turn the traveler or the poor dependant out of doors,” in his new cure, their visitors are limited to a precious few: farmer Flamborough, the blind piper, and Burchell.⁴⁵ The claims of an extended family no longer regulate the Primroses’ activities, and the family fails to fulfill the Stoic ideal, extending their benevolence to all, since their chief worry is self-sufficiency and such extravagant virtue appears unsustainable.

That virtue survives the loss of fortune is established in Burchell’s narrative. He tells the Vicar what appears to be an account of virtue’s mismanagement couched in terms of the Stoic ideal, which would have one extend one’s good-will equally to all. Burchell relates how he had “los[t] a regard for private interest in universal sympathy. He loved all mankind; for fortune prevented him from knowing that there were rascals. . . . Thus disposed to relieve . . . he found numbers disposed to solicit: his profusions began to impair his fortune, but not his good-nature” until, “no longer able to satisfy every request that was made him, instead of *money* he gave *promises*” which he could not fulfill.⁴⁶ Such a model of virtuous action seems to be compromised in two respects: first, one assists the vicious as well as the virtuous, and second, that assistance, as with Primrose, is limited by material need. But means only restrict the good one can do if they determine one’s virtuous activity. Otherwise, means of any sort are unnecessary, as Hume famously declared: “Virtue in rags is still virtue, and the love, which

⁴⁴ Ibid., 21; 26.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 31–32; 18; 19; 33.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 29.

it procures, attends a man into a dungeon or desert, where the virtue can no longer be exerted in action, and is lost to all the world.”⁴⁷ So Burchell’s virtue survives, because he does not allow his penury to justify passivity, but rather persists in his concern for others. His mediation, not his fortune, comprises Burchell’s virtuous activity in the novel. This, of course, helps both the vicious and the virtuous, and rightly so, since the consideration of everyone’s welfare does not distinguish between the two. In fact, Burchell only discovers at the very end of the novel how villainous Ned is, and his virtue suffers not a bit for it.

Instead, the Primroses’ virtue suffers. For once they are settled in their new home, the Squire makes their acquaintance and proceeds to help them, apparently with a desire for “no other reward but the pleasure of having served my friend.” Thus appearing to delight in selfless benevolence, Ned threatens the family’s virtue not through his assistance, but rather by claiming to adhere to an ethics in which virtue is its own reward. Under these pretenses, the Squire offers the family an alliance that will add to their connections and, more importantly, their prominence. Because the Vicar finds himself in a situation in which extending his family and improving its situation appear to be the same endeavor, he is easily misled into believing Ned has the family’s welfare in view. Primrose therefore endeavors to raise the family above “the scrubs” around them and encourages the family’s connections with their social betters out of self-interest. He departs from his former virtue, forgetting his earlier declaration that “aspiring beggary is wretchedness itself.”⁴⁸ Here is a crisis of virtue far more decisive than virtue’s wealth or poverty, for virtue is most endangered not when Olivia elopes with the Squire or when Primrose is brought, severely burned and virtually penniless, to jail. Virtue is lost when the Primrose family makes the love of others a self-interested project.

THE BENEFITS OF MORAL REFORM

In these endeavors, however, the Primrose family has little success, since their “art . . . is opposed with still greater.” Self-interest, it turns out, is more difficult to sustain than virtue, for when the family’s attempts to raise

⁴⁷ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* 2nd ed. (1739–40, repr. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 584. See also Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8.

⁴⁸ Goldsmith, *Vicar*, 123; 58; 25–26.

funds at the local fair miscarry and a fire burns their belongings, Primrose is thrown into debtor's prison. The Vicar's lesson is clear: virtue may not require any means, but self-interest is arrested without any funds. So when the officers of justice arrive and his family asks him to placate Ned in order to avoid imprisonment, Primrose demands, "Why will you thus attempt to persuade me to the thing that is not right!" Acting in his own interest is no longer indistinguishable from extending his family, and as soon as Ned's intentions are clear, so are those of virtue: "let us hold to the right, and wherever we are thrown, we can still retire to a charming apartment, when we can look round our own hearts with intrepidity and with pleasure!" Primrose reforms and declares that virtue is as good in a prison as anywhere else. Indeed, he realizes, virtue cannot be improved or surpassed, for it has no limits, even behind bars. Here Primrose finally has occasion for virtuous activity in a situation, such as Burchell experienced, in which he has no means. The Vicar easily withstands this test, not by recovering his fortune, but by recognizing that the prisoners, "however fallen, are still men, and that is a very good title to my affections." It is therefore his "duty . . . to attempt to reclaim them." That Primrose is virtuous for its own sake is quickly established: Jenkinson, his fellow prisoner, "laughed heartily" at the Vicar's plan to reform the prisoners, while his family expresses "universal disapprobation." Nevertheless Primrose proceeds, noting that "no other motive but [the prisoners'] welfare could induce me to this; that I was their fellow prisoner, and now got nothing by preaching."⁴⁹ He extends his concern from his family to those with whom he has neither acquaintance nor connection, treating them just as he treats his wife and children.

Acquaintance and connection are easily established, beginning with Jenkinson, a villain responsible for many of the Vicar's losses. Imprisoned for forgery, Jenkinson is, like Primrose, without any means to help himself. When the latter is incarcerated, Jenkinson offers his assistance, noting that "you are allowed here nothing but straw, and your apartment is very large and cold. However you seem to be something of a gentleman, and as I have been one myself in my time, part of my bed-cloaths are heartily at your service." The connection Jenkinson makes is not one of Christian repentance, whereby he atones for past wrongs in the hope of forgiveness. He doesn't even recognize Primrose as a victim of his former crimes, and besides, Primrose appears to be in no position to do Jenkinson any service. He helps Primrose because the Vicar, like himself, is a gentleman at the end

⁴⁹ Ibid., 81; 139; 148; 144; 145; 148; 145.

of his tether; their common condition—what belongs to both of them even when they have nothing—prompts Jenkinson's assistance. It is Jenkinson's virtue then, not his vice, that Primrose notes: "your kindness in offering me assistance, when you could expect no return, shall be repaid with my endeavours to soften or totally suppress . . . [the] evidence"⁵⁰ against him. Rather than confirm their villainy, Primrose prompts the inmates to be virtuous. Virtue's plot is thus to develop virtue in others—its means and end are the same (after all, the benefits of reformation are not dictated by one's assets), and virtue becomes its own reward.

Now, as in *Wakefield*, Primrose is doing his duty without reward, but his virtue appears in a different light. Here his means do not enable him to be virtuous. In prison himself, Primrose extends his benevolence to those who have no hope of reward (they are, of course, being punished) and whose experience, rather than piety, reveals the good they have in common. For the prospect of divine justice in the hereafter has been as effective in making the prisoners virtuous as the prospect of legal punishment here. In order to reform the prisoners, then, Primrose must show them what is, in fact, good and what is just in this world, where they are cut off from the benefit of the next.

Addressing the prisoners in a room "common to both felons and debtors," the Vicar suggests that they all have a common good: to reform and, instead of participating in the commercial world by cheating and stealing from others, to engage in the honest industry that will repair the bonds connecting them to society. For the problem with prisons, Primrose explains, is that they "find or make men guilty . . . [They] enclose wretches for the commission of one crime, and return them, if returned alive, fitted for the perpetration of thousands." Instead of providing "places . . . where the accused might be attended by such as could give them repentance if guilty, or new motives to virtue if innocent," the prison system cuts criminals off from the operations of society that promote the common good. Primrose suggests that if society took the good of the criminals, rather than their punishment, into account in protecting the public welfare, the prisoners would reform. So he sets those that "chose to work at cutting pegs for tobacconists and shoemakers," whereby "each earned something every day . . . sufficient to maintain him."⁵¹ Survival thus does not depend on self-interest, but is born of other-concern. The system of reward and punishment he institutes is based on the prisoners' conduct, not their profit, and

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 144; 149.

reflects the social, not the individual, good. Hence even in a “dungeon or desert,” as Hume put it, virtue can be gained, not “lost to all the world.”

With this reformation, Primrose criticizes “the very laws” of society, which “contribute to the accumulation of wealth,” instead of goodness, by mistaking the good of society and securing individual interest, rather than ensuring the benefit of all. Indeed the larger reformation the novel calls for beyond the walls of the prison is for laws that promote the common good, in keeping with natural bonds. Like the people in a state of nature, the prisoners are brought “from their native ferocity into friendship and obedience,”⁵² but Primrose reforms the social compact within the framework of Stoic sociability so that the justice done reflects the value of social bonds, not the merit of the individual.

The virtuous society with which the novel ends is thus composed via the disinterested extension of affinal ties, rather than through the creation of strict paragons of goodness. George’s unselfish union with Arabella Wilmot is the ideal put forth, not George himself, who, Brown notes, seems to be rewarded for no “virtues beyond good looks.”⁵³ In this respect, Sophia’s marriage to Burchell is exemplary as well. Even Olivia’s and Ned’s nuptials do good, for they ensure the Squire’s reformation: he “resides in quality of companion at a relation’s house . . . [where] they make no stranger of him. His time is pretty much taken up in keeping his relation, who is a little melancholy, in spirits.” As such, he is “not entirely forsaken” and is supplied with “a bare competence . . . to support the wants of life, but not its follies.”⁵⁴ Ned is not cut off from society and sustenance like a criminal, for sociability, not self-interest, ensures everyone’s wellbeing.

And so everyone—not just the Vicar—benefits. Such was the Stoic description of the good produced by virtuous action, which, Cicero notes, belongs to no one in particular, but is held “in common” and sustains the “mutual Society, Endearment and Connections . . . amongst Mankind.”⁵⁵ Primrose and Jenkinson, whose efforts (without material means) bring about this conclusion, share the good of reformation with everyone else, and even the prisoners partake of the “provisions distributed in great quantities among the populace.”⁵⁶ The end of the novel is thus not the sort in which the virtuous are rewarded and the vicious punished—a narrative

⁵² Ibid., 101; 151; 149.

⁵³ Brown, 173.

⁵⁴ Goldsmith, *Vicar*, 176; 177; 175; 179–80.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 167.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 179; 181.

demonstration of Christian providence that determines the merit of the individual—for in this world, justice is not individual, but social.

THE ECONOMY OF STOIC SOCIABILITY

Virtue is not compromised, then, even if benefit takes several, even material, forms because reward—including the restoration of Primrose's wealth and the five hundred pounds Burchell gives Jenkinson—is only an extension of virtue's benefits and motivates nothing. That is to say, financial matters do not regulate or limit the circulation of other-concern. So when Carson argues that the failure of sentimental ideals in the novel is a failure of Stoicism, he misconstrues the problem. Carson proposes that "the family fails to realize the republican ideals of liberty, austerity, virtue, and disinterested decision-making deriving from extensive views . . . because Goldsmith's sentimentalism, itself inseparable from a new commercial world, is inconsistent with the stoical virtues of such Roman republicans as Lucius Junius Brutus and Cato."⁵⁷ Yet virtue, as I have demonstrated, does not triumph by being cut off or by cutting others off from commercial affairs. The honest life that the Vicar endeavors to lead in the country, where he and his parishioners are "Remote from polite society," is no longer sustainable in the 1760s. By that time, the impact of commercial enterprise extended far beyond London, and everyone's welfare, as Primrose's experience demonstrates, depended on the marketplace in one way or another. To suggest, then, that "The novel . . . presents Primrose's successful attempt to become a republican lawgiver . . . in the more securely isolated microcosm of the prison" is to ignore the way the Vicar reconnects the prisoners to the good of society, and the fact that Goldsmith's sentimentalism acquires the rigor of "stoical virtue" in order to redeem social bonds. He therefore does not "look nostalgically back to a pre-commercial nation," as Carson suggests, but rather to a society, and an ethics, not predicated on self-interest, so that everyone benefits from the commercial economy.⁵⁸ In other words, Goldsmith shows that the aim of profiting at the expense of another corrupts any social exchange, be it the sale of a horse at a fair or deceiving a woman to obtain her fortune. Hence he rejects self-interest as the proper foundation of society and of commerce.

⁵⁷ Carson, 177. See also Jonathan Lamb, *The Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 143–49, on the failure of universal sympathy in Goldsmith's novel.

⁵⁸ Goldsmith, *Vicar*, 177; 178.

Goldsmith calls for the kind of legislation and regulation that ensures justice in business and in marriage, rather than individual profit. His opposition to Hardwick's Marriage Act (1754) stemmed, after all, from his belief that it made sure that the rich would marry the rich, while the poor would become even more so. Such laws threaten the basis of society and commerce, because they discourage industry: while indicting the marriage act in *The Citizen of the World*, Goldsmith explains that "Great wealth in the possession of one stagnates, and extreme poverty with another keeps him in unambitious indigence," whereas "the moderately rich are generally active, not too far removed from poverty to fear its calamities, nor too near extreme wealth to slacken the nerve of labour."⁵⁹ The economy of self-interest encourages the accumulation of wealth, whereby, Primrose laments, "the natural ties that bind the rich and poor together are broken," for the rich "employ the superfluity of [their] fortune . . . in making dependants," and "each very opulent man generally gathers round him a circle of the poorest of the people"—a very different circle of connected citizens than that the Stoics envisioned.⁶⁰ The economy of benevolence, on the other hand, promotes labor for all.

Primrose demonstrates that internal industry is the corrective, for in order to benefit others, one must extend one's efforts beyond the aim of providing for oneself. Industry, not means, thus establishes the limits of benevolence, as in "The Proceedings of Providence vindicated." The problem there, as in Goldsmith's novel, appears to be one of means, rather than self-interest, because in the pre-commercial state Asem visits, everyone practices universal benevolence. But the people work only for themselves, when working for others, rather than wealth per se, is what constitutes the public good.⁶¹ Indeed, industry is what sustains the benevolence of forgetting "private interest in universal sympathy," as Burchell and Asem do. Effort, to be sure, is what prevents the Stoic sage from falling into the apathetic passivity that his famous indifference would seem to produce. So for Burchell to work for the benefit of others (as when he harvests the hay with the Primroses) and for Asem to apply himself to commerce, extending his circle of friends, shows the virtue of a commercial economy.⁶² It can promote everyone's welfare, equally. As such, the achievement of the Stoic ideal in Goldsmith's novel is not that everyone learns to love everyone else

⁵⁹ Goldsmith, *Works* 2: 301.

⁶⁰ Goldsmith, *Vicar*, 100; 101.

⁶¹ Goldsmith, *Works* 3: 61, 64, 65.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 66.

to the same degree. Sophia's disinterest, for instance, does not prompt her to overcome her preference for Burchell and consider marrying Jenkinson. What she and the rest do, instead, is recognize and redeem their social bonds, marital and otherwise, with everyone else. In so doing, Goldsmith makes the extension of sympathy render self-interest futile, stagnant, and without credit. It is self-interest, not universal sympathy, that helps no one and accomplishes nothing in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, while benevolence, in its most extreme, industrious form, provides for everyone.

Lafayette, Indiana.



*Mandeville's Ship:
Theistic Design and Philosophical History in
Charles Darwin's Vision of Natural Selection*

Stephen G. Alter

I. INTRODUCTION: THE VIEW FROM THE SHORELINE

In the diary he kept during his five-year voyage on H.M.S. *Beagle*, Charles Darwin described an episode that would later be made famous by his published *Journal of Researches* (1839). The diary's version, however, included more detail. It was mid-December of 1832, and the ship was running several miles off of the northeastern coast of Tierra del Fuego, at the extreme southern tip of South America. From here Darwin and the crew members got their first glimpse of the land's inhabitants: "Shortly by the aid of glasses we could see a group & some scattered Indians evidently watching the ship with interest." The following afternoon, after passing around to the south side of the island, the *Beagle* entered the Bay of Good Success, so named by Captain James Cook when his ship the *Endeavour* dropped anchor there over sixty years earlier. Here again, Darwin said,

a party of Fuegians were watching us; they were perched on a wild peak overhanging the sea & surrounded by wood. As we passed by they all sprang up & waving their cloaks of skins sent forth a loud sonorous shout. This they continued for a long time. These people followed the ship up the harbor & just before dark we

again heard their cry & soon saw their fire at the entrance of the Wigwam which they built for the night.¹

The next day Darwin went ashore with a landing party to make contact with the Fuegians, a people of rudimentary culture living in an extremely inhospitable environment. The experience impressed him deeply: "It was without exception the most curious & interesting spectacle I ever beheld. I would not have believed how entire the difference between savage and civilized man is."²

This encounter between Victorian Englishmen and primitive tribesmen has attracted considerable commentary: historians have been interested especially in its bearing on Darwin's views concerning racial differences.³ Far more important for present purposes, however, are the events that came beforehand, events Darwin barely mentioned when he edited his shipboard diary to produce the published *Journal*, later retitled *Voyage of the Beagle*. There the initial sighting of Tierra del Fuego is recounted only in brief, omitting the description of the wild people watching from the cliffs along the shore.⁴ Only in the diary do we see Darwin and his companions gazing out at those distant figures—even as the latter gazed back, with evident "interest," at the approaching ship.

Surely this scene helped to inspire an illustration found in the final chapter of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859):

When we no longer look at an organic being as a savage looks at a ship, as at something wholly beyond his comprehension; when we regard every production of nature as one which has had a history; when we contemplate every complex structure and instinct as the summing up of many contrivances, each useful to the possessor, nearly in the same way as when we look at any great

¹ Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Beagle Diary*, ed. Richard Darwin Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 121–22.

² Darwin, *Beagle Diary*, 123.

³ See especially Janet Browne, "Missionaries and the Human Mind: Charles Darwin and Robert FitzRoy," in *Darwin's Laboratory: Evolutionary Theory and Natural History in the Pacific*, eds. R. MacLeod and P. R. Rehbock (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 263–82; and James Moore and Adrian Desmond, *Introduction to Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), xi–lviii.

⁴ Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the geology and natural history of the various countries visited by H.M.S. Beagle* (1839; New York: New York University Press, 1987), 118.

mechanical invention as the summing up of the labour, the experience, the reason, and even the blunders of numerous workmen; when we thus view each organic being, how far more interesting, I speak from experience, will the study of natural history become!⁵

Much has been written about the *Origin's* rhetorical images, famously including the "entangled bank" teeming with life, the branching tree of organic descent, and of course the analogy between selective animal breeding and evolutionary "selection" in nature.⁶ Little attention has been paid, however, to the ship-and-savage illustration, this despite the prominent position it occupies in Darwin's text.⁷ It appears only a few pages from the end of Darwin's book in each of the six editions.⁸ It also appears at the end of the early draft statements of his theory, the brief (39-page) "Pencil Sketch" of 1842 and the longer (230-page) "Essay" of 1844.⁹ Unlike the *Origin*, however, the early manuscripts make this illustration their penultimate feature, placing it immediately before the peroration (contained in all versions) about the "grandeur" of the evolutionary view of life. (The "Sketch" and "Essay" do not yet include the entangled-bank passage, situated between the ship analogy and the peroration in the *Origin's* text.¹⁰)

⁵ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, facsimile edition (1859; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 485–86.

⁶ On the importance of Darwin's figurative language, see especially Gillian Beer, "'The Face of Nature': Anthropomorphic Elements in the Language of *The Origin of Species*," in *Languages of Nature: Critical Essays on Science and Literature*, ed., L. J. Jordanova (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 207–43; and David Kohn, "Darwin's Ambiguity: The Secularization of Biological Meaning," *British Journal of the History of Science* 22 (1989): 215–39, on pp. 234–36.

⁷ Brief references to this illustration appear in John A. Campbell, "Nature, Religion and Emotional Response: A Reconsideration of Darwin's Affective Decline," *Victorian Studies* 18 (1974): 159–74, on p. 168; and Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin: Voyaging* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 62.

⁸ Morse Peckham, ed., *The Origin of Species by Charles Darwin: A Variorum Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959), 755.

⁹ Charles Darwin, *The Foundations of the Origin of Species: Two Essays Written in 1842 and 1844*, vol. 10, in *The Works of Charles Darwin*, eds. P. H. Barrett and R. B. Freeman, 20 vols. (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 39, 189. The early manuscripts refer to a ship "or other great work of art," using the latter term in its older sense, as in "artifice." Writing in 1909, Francis Darwin incorrectly suggested that his father, when he wrote the *Origin*, changed the analogy from art (as in fine art) to technology. *Ibid.*, 39 n.77.

¹⁰ David Kohn has demonstrated, however, that Darwin's entangled bank was "long a latent metaphor." "The Aesthetic Construction of Darwin's Theory," in *The Elusive Synthesis: Aesthetics and Science*, ed. A. I. Tauber (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 13–48, on p. 33.

Originally, then, the savage observing the ship was nearly the last piece of imagery that Darwin had intended to leave with his readers. It had served, that is, up until he wrote the *Origin* itself, as part of the illustrative climax to the presentation of his evolution theory.

Here we will examine this analogy, focusing on three overlapping aspects. First, I will suggest that the ship image epitomized Darwin's response to the traditional British belief in theistic "design"—an idea set forth by Robert Boyle and John Ray in the seventeenth century, and later given classic expression in William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802). (Archdeacon Paley, 1743–1805, was an Anglican churchman and an apologist for Christian theism.) The phenomena of nature, the argument ran, manifested design, which is to say, intelligent purpose. Hence nature had to have a wise designer, on the analogy of a skilled inventor or master craftsman as the maker of a complex instrument. Although Darwin did not consider his evolution theory to be atheistic, he did see it as opposed to the notion of design, specifically to the idea that the Creator had pre-adapted each organic form to its particular conditions of existence. This outlook, he said, rendered nature's facts "wholly beyond . . . comprehension," which was the naïve viewpoint of the savage. For to regard a living organism—or a modern sailing ship—as having been consciously designed suggested a failure to understand how it actually had come into being. Darwin's alternative was to regard organic forms each as having a "history": every complex feature was the "summing up of many contrivances." Or, as he said in his 1842 and 1844 manuscripts, "the summing up of a *long history* of contrivances." The 1844 version added that an organism should be regarded "as a production that has a history which we may search into."¹¹

Accordingly, Darwin declared that living nature should be viewed in "nearly the same way" as one would look at "any great mechanical invention as the summing up of the labour, the experience, the reason and even the blunders of numerous workmen." Despite the reference here to "*any* great mechanical invention," Darwin cited only one such device as an example: rather than invoke the steam-driven technology of that era, he pointed to the sailing ship, a particularly apt vessel for conveying his anti-design message. This aptness shows itself especially if we contrast Darwin's ship with William Paley's famous comparison between the human eye and a telescope. The telescope (said Paley) had been constructed according to

¹¹ Darwin, *Foundations*, 39, 189, emphasis added.

strict optical principles and for a specific purpose. Could any less be said of the eye, or of any other organ of extreme precision?¹² Although Darwin did not set his own illustration directly in opposition to this analogy, I will argue that the sailing ship in effect functioned as an alternative to Paley's telescope.

The second task of this essay will be to identify the sources that inspired Darwin's ship image. Although his experience at Tierra del Fuego was foundational, the illustration was actually a compound of several parts. Superimposed on Darwin's personal memories were ships and savages of a wholly speculative nature, these encountered in texts Darwin read in the years following the voyage of the *Beagle*. Especially influential were David Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779) and Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714), the one a classic critique of design thinking and the other a conjectural account of the origins of human civility.¹³ Yet while they thus treated different topics, these writings each contributed something essential to the formation of Darwin's analogy.

Finally, by situating these texts among a related set of works that Darwin read in this period, we can clarify our understanding of *how*, in Darwin's thinking, natural selection displaced the idea of a designing deity.¹⁴ As historians have noted, Darwin actually retained much of the logic and rhetoric that characterized design theory.¹⁵ He especially retained Paley's question about the well-made adaptations by which living forms are fitted for survival: how to account for these apparent manifestations of design? It is true that Darwin came to regard adaptation as imperfectly attained: he said in an early notebook that it was "perfect [only] to the then existing

¹² William Paley, *Natural Theology* (1802; New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), chs. 3, 5, and 6.

¹³ "Darwin's Reading Notebooks," in *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, eds. F. Burkhardt and S. Smith, 12 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–), Appendix IV, 4: 434–59, on pp. 456, 458.

¹⁴ On the relationship between traditional British natural theology and Darwin's natural selection theory, see the essays by Phillip R. Sloan, Jonathan Hodge, Gregory Radick, and John Headley Brooke, in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, eds. J. Hodge and G. Radick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ See, for instance, John F. Cornell, "God's Magnificent Law: The Bad Influence of Theistic Metaphysics on Darwin's Estimation of Natural Selection," *Journal of the History of Biology* 20 (1987): 381–412; Abigail Lustig, "Natural Atheology," in *Darwinian Heresies*, eds. A. Lustig, R. Richards, and M. Ruse (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 69–83; and Michael Ruse, *Darwin and Design: Does Evolution have a Purpose?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 119, 121.

conditions—or nearly so.”¹⁶ Still, he wanted to show why there was at least *this degree* of adaptation, and in this sense he continued Paley’s project.

Even so, Darwin did not simply replace Paley’s supreme mechanical inventor with an equally mechanistic view of natural selection. Rather, as I will suggest in the most speculative phase of my argument, Darwin viewed the selection process in terms of a particular kind of narrative, the kind found in eighteenth-century philosophical or “conjectural” history. That genre included works by Continental figures such as Montesquieu and Rousseau, yet it was developed most extensively by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers.¹⁷ Exposure to writings by the latter group would have taught Darwin that blind-yet-cumulative historical experience could eventuate in spontaneous order. And, extrapolating from society to nature, he would have seen that such a process could substitute quite effectively for the calculated workmanship of a Designer. The result, I argue, was more than just a vivid illustration appearing in the final chapter of the *Origin of Species*. For Darwin drew on the Scottish historical outlook not only to *represent* his response to British natural theology but also to conceptualize that response in the first place.

II. DARWIN’S SHIP VERSUS PALEY’S TELESCOPE

First we examine Darwin’s ship analogy in relation to his published remarks about design. The illustration and its immediate context actually made no direct reference to the design thesis. Rather, Darwin merely said that the study of natural history would become “far more interesting” as his evolution theory gained acceptance; he also made predictions as to how his theory would link together the various subfields of the life sciences. From this point, however, it was but a short step to Darwin’s critique of design thinking. He made the connection explicit at the beginning of his book *Fertilization of Orchids* (1862), which was his first major publication following the *Origin*: “This treatise affords me . . . an opportunity of attempting to show that the study of organic beings may be as interesting to

¹⁶ Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 201–2; *Charles Darwin’s Notebooks, 1836–1844*, eds. Paul H. Barrett, Peter J. Gautrey, Sandra Herbert, David Kohn, and Sydney Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Macculloch Abstract 58.

¹⁷ H. M. Höpfl, “From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment,” *The Journal of British Studies* 17 (1978): 19–40; P. B. Wood, “The Natural History of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment,” *History of Science* 28 (1990): 89–123; and Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 64–77.

an observer who is fully convinced that the structure of each is due to secondary laws, as to one who views every trifling detail of structure as the result of the direct interposition of the Creator.”¹⁸ Previously, the prospect of adding to man’s knowledge of God’s workmanship had been considered nature study’s deepest appeal. Yet the loss of that agenda would be more than made up for if disparate phenomena could be brought under a single unifying theory—for Darwin, the essence of what made an inquiry “interesting.” Darwin also argued throughout his writings that facts could thus be explained that otherwise would remain isolated, hence “inexplicable.”¹⁹ As he said at the end of his *Descent of Man* (1871), “He who is not content to look, like a savage, at the phenomena of nature as disconnected, cannot any longer believe that man is the work of a separate act of creation.”²⁰

Darwin confronted the design thesis more directly in chapter six of the *Origin*, in a section on “organs of extreme perfection.” Here he alluded to the rhetorical centerpiece of William Paley’s *Natural Theology*:

It is scarcely possible to avoid comparing the eye to a telescope. We know that this instrument has been perfected by the long-continued efforts of the highest human intellects; and we naturally infer that the eye has been formed by a somewhat analogous process. But may not this inference be presumptuous? Have we any right to assume that the Creator works by intellectual powers like those of man? If we must compare the eye to an optical instrument, we ought in imagination to take a thick layer of transparent tissue, with a nerve sensitive to light beneath, and then suppose every part of the layer to be continually changing slowly in density. . . . Let this process go on for millions on millions of years [etc.].²¹

We should be clear as to why Darwin rejected the eye-telescope analogy. It was not because it invoked human endeavor *per se*; rather, the problem was its assumption that the Creator works “by *intellectual powers* like those of man,” a critique (as we will see) taken straight from Hume’s *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. It is true that Darwin referred to “long-

¹⁸ Charles Darwin, *The Various Contrivances by which Orchids are Fertilized by Insects*, 2, quoted in Campbell, “Darwin’s Affective Decline,” 169.

¹⁹ For Darwin’s use of the word “inexplicable” in this way, see, for example, *Origin of Species*, 59, 97, 188, 243.

²⁰ Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Intro. by J. T. Bonner and R. M. May (1871; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 2:386.

²¹ Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 188.

continued efforts,” suggesting that the telescope resulted from incremental development. Yet he also (rightly construing Paley) characterized that instrument as the work of “the highest human intellects,” made by those who could envisage what they wanted and had a fair idea of how to go about producing it. By contrast, nature worked opportunistically. It made use of whatever was available, in terms of inherited structures and instincts, to bring about a gradual succession of relatively improved adaptations. This, of course, was the kind of process represented by Darwin’s ship, which was the analogical antithesis of Paley’s telescope. For the ship embodied a *particular kind* of technology: it had evolved from much simpler antecedents (before there were ships there were boats) and had undergone a long series of *ad hoc* improvements, involving the piecemeal discovery of what did and did not work.

Further comment on the design argument appeared in the *Origin*’s concluding chapter. Here Darwin spoke bluntly: “It is so easy to hide our ignorance under such expressions as the ‘plan of creation,’ ‘utility of design,’ etc., and to think that we give an explanation when we only restate a fact.”²² He went on to accuse design thinkers of adopting a double standard: “Although [such] naturalists very properly demand a full explanation of every difficulty from those who believe in the mutability of species, on their own side they ignore the whole subject of the first appearance of species in what they consider reverent silence.”²³ That is, they tolerated in themselves an even greater inability to explain phenomena than that for which they would fault a transmutationist. Indeed, Darwin suggested, special creationists positively valued that inability. For, having pointed to evidence of purposeful adaptation in nature, it was essential for them to insist that these patterns *could not be explained* apart from invoking supernatural design. In this sense, creationists placed a premium on their own ignorance.²⁴

Darwin affirmed that natural selection acted for a “purpose,” thereby retaining the language of design. Yet he jettisoned the traditional teleology that presupposed a grand plan, and taught instead that selection served the good only of individual organisms.²⁵ Moreover, in describing complex

²² Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 481–82; also: Darwin, *Foundations*, 161. Darwin made similar remarks about the theistic interpretation of morphological unity: *Foundations*, 30–31; *Origin of Species*, 435.

²³ Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 483. Also: *ibid.*, 167.

²⁴ J. H. Brooke notes this tendency of design thinking: *Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, 193.

²⁵ James G. Lennox, “Teleology,” in *Keywords in Evolutionary Biology*, eds. Evelyn Fox Keller and Elisabeth A. Lloyd (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992),

organs and instincts as a “summing up” of their constituent parts, Darwin implied that these structures were formed by nothing greater *than* those parts. He illustrated this revised notion of teleology in *Fertilization of Orchids*, in a passage that was almost an extension of the *Origin*’s ship analogy:

Although an organ may not have been originally formed for some special purpose, if it now serves for this end we are justified in saying that it is specially contrived for it. On the same principle, if a man were to make a machine for some special purpose, but were to use old wheels, springs, and pulleys, only slightly altered, the whole machine, with all its parts, might be said to be specially contrived for its present purpose. Thus throughout nature almost every part of each living being has probably served, in a slightly modified condition, for diverse purposes, and has acted in the living machinery of many ancient and distinct specific forms.²⁶

In short, there was no preordained fit between an organic form and its function. Rather, the available materials were constantly redeployed. The unnamed machine in this illustration used “old wheels, springs, and pulleys,” these “only slightly altered” to meet new demands.

III. LAW VERSUS DESIGN IN THE NOTEBOOK YEARS

We turn now to the years immediately following the *Beagle* voyage, to see how this period set the stage for Darwin’s ship analogy. The voyage ended in October of 1836, and, within months of that event, Darwin had embraced the idea of species evolution; he had also decided to directly challenge the Paleyan design outlook. A likely inspiration for this latter project was an open letter written earlier that year by the astronomer John Herschel to the geologist Charles Lyell—two of Darwin’s intellectual heroes. Herschel admired Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1830, 1833), yet he called for something more than the vague treatment of the transmutation question given in that work. Although Lyell properly rejected Jean-Baptiste Lamar-

324–33; Kohn, “Darwin’s Ambiguity,” 233. The individual-utility view also was set forth by Hume in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*: Phillip R. Sloan, “The Question of Natural Purpose,” in *Evolution and Creation*, ed. Ernan McMullin (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 13.

²⁶ Darwin, *Fertilization of Orchids*, 348, quoted in Ruse, *Darwin and Design*, 122.

ck's evolutionism, he offered no solution (said Herschel) to "that mystery of mysteries, the replacement of extinct species by others." Herschel insisted that the appearance of new species be explained by "intermediate causes," that is, by a "natural in contradistinction to a miraculous process." For God, he said, must have operated by natural law in *all* spheres, not just in Newton's physical universe.²⁷

In light of Hershel's challenge, it is significant that Darwin soon was reading his grandfather Erasmus Darwin's massive treatise *Zoonomia* (1794–96), on the "laws of animate life."²⁸ Among its many topics, this work included an argument in favor of organic evolution. Accordingly, as he began his own evolutionary speculations in March of 1837, Charles Darwin did so with an emphasis on biological law. This he signaled by penning the title "*Zoonomia*" on the first of the series of theoretical notebooks he would keep over the next two years.

Erasmus Darwin's treatise is important to us also for a further reason, its gloss of a famous critique of theistic design theory:

The late Mr. David Hume, in his posthumous works, places the powers of generation much above those of our boasted reason; and adds, that reason can only make a machine, as a clock or a ship. . . . [He] concludes that the world itself might have been generated, rather than created; that is, it might have been gradually produced from very small beginnings, increasing by the activity of its inherent principles, rather than by a sudden evolution of the whole by Almighty fiat.²⁹

For the most part this was an accurate summary of the argument in Hume's *Dialogues*, and it was a message that Charles Darwin heeded: when he re-read his grandfather's book two years later, he jotted next to the above

²⁷ Kohn, "Darwin's Ambiguity," 222–23. Hershel quoted in Walter F. Cannon, "The Impact of Uniformitarianism: Two Letters from John Hershel to Charles Lyell, 1836–1837," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 105 (1961): 301–14, on p. 305. On Lyell and Herschel, see Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 75–83. On other efforts to reform natural theology in the 1830s, see Ruse, *Darwinian Revolution*, 70–74; and Neal C. Gillespie, "Divine Design and the Industrial Revolution: William Paley's Abortive Reform of Natural Theology," *Isis* 81 (1990): 214–29, especially pp. 225–29.

²⁸ "Darwin's Reading Notebooks," 456.

²⁹ Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia, or the Laws of Organic Life*, 2 vols. (1794–96; New York: AMS Press, 1974), 1: 509.

passage a reference to his newly-formed natural selection theory.³⁰ There was one point of detail, however, in which the elder Darwin did not accurately represent Hume's message: he suggested that the *Dialogues* had rejected all analogies with man-made devices, including both clocks and ships. Later, after reading Hume's actual work, Charles Darwin would reflect its argument more faithfully, showing that ship-construction fell into a special category.

Meanwhile, the younger Darwin had gained a fair idea of Hume's critique of the design idea. This, combined with Herschel's agenda, produced a double-edged thesis that would permeate his writings from the notebook period onward. One aspect was the poverty of design thinking and the other was the need for "secondary laws" of nature applicable to the organic realm.³¹ As the historian David Kohn has argued, Darwin originally embraced these ideas so as to promote the reform, not the destruction, of British natural theology.³² Darwin often railed in his notebooks against the idea ("from cramped imagination") that God had drawn up a blueprint for each separate species, including a "long succession of vile Molluscos animals. . . . How beneath the dignity of him who is supposed to have said let there be light and there was light." Indeed, "how far grander" it would have been for God to have created by means of "laws he established in all organic nature."³³

In late September of 1838, Darwin read Thomas R. Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798; 1826 edition), which pointed toward what he believed to be just such a law. As population growth outstripped the means of subsistence, only the best-suited individuals would survive and propagate, resulting (Darwin reasoned) in the eventual modification of the species in question. Darwin developed this idea over the next several months and thus got his "theory by which to work," what he eventually would call natural selection.³⁴ During this period, he elaborated what he

³⁰ Sloan, "The Question of Natural Purpose," 129–30, 149 n.51.

³¹ See John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 222; Cornell, "God's Magnificent Law," 384–90; John F. Cornell, "Newton of the Grassblade? Darwin and the Problem of Organic Teleology," *Isis* 77 (1986): 405–521, on p. 419; and Jonathan Hodge, *Cambridge Companion*, 50, 58.

³² Kohn, "Darwin's Ambiguity," 222–24, 238. See also: Cornell, "God's Magnificent Law."

³³ *Darwin's Notebooks*, D36–37. Darwin conveyed the same idea: *ibid.*, M154 and Macculloch Abstract 54.

³⁴ The quoted phrase appeared later, in C. Darwin, *Autobiography*, ed. Nora Barlow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 120.

had previously said about law-bound nature. First, he continued to complain of inconsistency on the part of those who attributed the cosmos to general laws yet explained living forms in terms of direct design. He wrote the following in his notebook that November:

We can allow planets, suns, universe, nay whole systems of universe to be governed by laws, but the smallest insect, we wish to be created at once by special act, provided with its instincts, its place in nature, its range, etc. [All] must be [either] a special act, or result of laws. Yet we placidly believe the Astronomer, when he tells us satellites, etc. «The Savage admires not a steam engine, but [if shown] a piece of coloured glass is lost in astonishment at the artificer.» Our faculties are more fitted to recognize the wonderful structure of a beetle than a Universe.³⁵

The editorial markings surrounding “The Savage . . . artificer” indicate an insertion later added to the original note.³⁶ In part, this interpolated passage likely recalled Darwin’s travels: the *Beagle*’s crewmembers probably gave glass trinkets to the natives of Tierra del Fuego. (According to the ship’s captain, the Fuegians greatly prized ornamental beads and pieces of broken glass.³⁷) That aspect aside, the uncomprehending savage as such was a familiar figure from the literature of the period: Darwin would have seen in Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, for instance, remarks about the way “ignorant savages” were unable to conceive of the advantages of civilization.³⁸ Still, the most significant feature of the illustration in Darwin’s notebook was something not to be found in the common literary culture. For here Darwin made his first appeal to the uncomprehending savage *specifically as representing the design theorist*.³⁹

There was a further way in which Darwin elaborated his previously-

³⁵ *Darwin’s Notebooks*, N36.

³⁶ Sandra Herbert and David Kohn, “Introduction,” *Darwin’s Notebooks*, 12.

³⁷ Robert Fitzroy, *Narrative of the Surveying Voyages of His Majesty’s ships Adventure and Beagle between the years 1826 and 1836*, 3 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1839), 1: 55–56; 2: 136, 139.

³⁸ Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), ch. 2. James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, edited and abridged by Christopher Hibbert (1791; New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 171. Darwin read Boswell’s *Life* in February of 1839: “Darwin’s Reading Notebooks,” 456.

³⁹ Earlier Darwin had referred to intellectual or moral qualities observed in real savages, not to the hypothetical figure seen in N36: see *Darwin’s Notebooks*, B4, C79, C150, N40, etc.

held views after forming his natural selection idea. Before reading Malthus, he had already referred to the “grand idea [of] God giving laws and then leaving all to follow consequences”—that is, allowing whatever consequences to occur.⁴⁰ Then, in a note he made in the final months of 1838, he added a now-famous comment: “I look at every adaptation as the surviving one of ten thousand trials, each step being perfect «or nearly so» to the then existing conditions. . . . In the Mollusca the nervous system is endowed with the knowledge [that is, reveals a pattern] of trying a hundred schemes of structure, in the course of ages «step by step».”⁴¹ Here Darwin portrayed the Malthusian sorting process as bound by strict necessity yet nevertheless improvised and contingent. That process established only the procedural conditions for adaptive change; it did not predetermine specific outcomes.⁴² Darwin thus evoked the Janus-faced historical tradition that he would epitomize later via his ship analogy.

IV. OF SAVAGES AND SHIPS: THE TEXTUAL SOURCES OF DARWIN'S IMAGE

Soon after his return from the voyage on the *Beagle*, Darwin began a wide-ranging reading program: this we see from the running list he kept of the things he read. Darwin had concluded, early on, that humans must have evolved from an ape-like ancestor, and so he was eager to explain the origins of humanity's mental, moral, and social traits. Accordingly, he consulted an array of philosophical writings in search of insight into these subjects. The texts that helped to inspire his savage-and-ship illustration were part of this research, for in these works he discovered material that was useful for more than his original purpose.⁴³ In February of 1839, Darwin read the English chemist Sir Humphry Davy's *Consolations in Travel, or, the Last Days of a Philosopher* (1830), a series of dialogues in the British

⁴⁰ *Darwin's Notebooks*, B114. Similar remarks appear *ibid.*, B101 and M136.

⁴¹ *Darwin's Notebooks*, Macculloch Abstract 58.

⁴² For a useful discussion of Darwin's reconciliation of design and chance in the notebook period, see M. J. S. Hodge and David Kohn, “The Immediate Origins of Natural Selection,” in *The Darwinian Heritage*, ed. D. Kohn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 185–206, on pp. 201–2. For a collection of similar remarks Darwin made about law and design in the 1860s, see David L. Hull, *Darwin and His Critics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 65–66. See also: Darwin, *Autobiography*, 87.

⁴³ Sandra Herbert emphasizes the phenomenon of Darwin making unexpected discoveries in his reading: “The Place of Man in the Development of Darwin's Theory of Transmutation, Part II,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 10 (1977): 155–227, on pp. 215–17, 226.

empiricist tradition. In a discussion of the mind-body problem, the chief interlocutor concedes that the machinery of the body may be necessary to the function of the mind, yet he argues that something additional is required to produce the mind's essence. He illustrates his point with a commonplace image:

A savage, who saw the operation of a number of power-looms weaving stockings cease at once on the stopping of the motion of a wheel, might well imagine that the motive force was in the wheel; he could not divine that it more immediately depended upon the steam, and ultimately upon a fire below a concealed boiler. The philosopher sees the fire which is the cause of the motion of this complicated machinery, so unintelligible to the savage; but both are equally ignorant of the *divine fire* which is the cause of the mechanism of organized [that is, living] structures.⁴⁴

Here, then, was the ultimate source of the illustration Darwin inserted into his notebook entry of three months earlier: "The Savage admires not a steam engine [etc.]." ⁴⁵ No doubt it was Davy's text (along with his Tierra del Fuego experience) that prompted Darwin to put in that additional comment. This act in itself suggests the high degree of intentionality with which Darwin collected material for use in illustrations. In this case, however, he adapted the borrowed image in an especially significant way. He inverted Davy's theistic argument and suggested that savage ignorance actually represented the outlook of the design thinker: it was *he* who found organic life "unintelligible."

Six months later, Darwin read David Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779). Although this work did not reject theism, it did critique the kind of natural theology that had prevailed in Britain for nearly a century. Hume called into question the inference from apparent design to a grand designer: the intricate patterns found in nature, he argued, did not necessarily spring from the mind of a supreme craftsman. Hume made this point in a number of passages, including the following:

⁴⁴ Humphry Davy, *Consolations in Travel, or, The Last Days of a Philosopher* (1830; London, Smith, Elder and Co., 1840), 340–41, emphasis in the original. (The passage appears in the 4th dialogue.) The February 1839 date for Darwin's reading of Davy is given in "Darwin's Reading Notebooks," 456; and in *Darwin's Notebooks*, N62.

⁴⁵ *Darwin's Notebooks*, N36. The editors of *Darwin's Notebooks* (p. 573, n. 36–1) link this note to the Davy text.

But were this world ever so perfect a production, it must still remain uncertain, whether all the excellencies of the work can justly be ascribed to the workman. *If we survey a ship*, what an exalted idea must we form of the ingenuity of the carpenter, who framed so complicated, useful, and beautiful a machine? And [yet] what surprise must we entertain, when we find him a stupid mechanic, who imitated others, and copied an art, which, through a long succession of ages, after multiplied trials, mistakes, corrections, deliberations, and controversies, had been gradually improving? Many worlds might have been botched and bungled, throughout an eternity, ere this system was struck out [that is, fashioned]: Much labour lost: Many fruitless trials made: And a slow, but continuing improvement carried on during infinite ages in the art of world-making.⁴⁶

Hume thus suggested that there could be multiple versions of the human-contrivance scenario, most of them at odds with the portrait of a supernatural artificer. Was the consummately skilled craftsman really the best model on which to base our view of the creator? Why not a “stupid mechanic” who had followed someone else’s plan, and whose predecessors (previous deities) themselves had proceeded by trial and error? Could not this theory equally explain the natural order? Indeed, said Hume, human fashioning of *any* kind was actually less plausible a model than was the notion that the natural world had developed spontaneously like a living organism in its own right: theoretically, at least, this hypothesis could better account for the known facts.⁴⁷ (This was the idea of Hume’s that Erasmus Darwin had mentioned in his *Zoonomia*.) Hence there were multiple possible explanations of how nature had reached its present state of complexity. Especially important for our purposes, the alternative that Hume set forth in the greatest detail was the idea of “an art, which, through a long succession of ages, after multiplied trials, mistakes, corrections, deliberations, and controversies, had been gradually improving.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd ed. (1779; London: Thomas Nelson, 1947), 167, emphasis added. (The ship passage appears in Part V.)

⁴⁷ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 181–84; William Lad Sessions, *Reading Hume's Dialogues: A Veneration for True Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 103. Hume, *Dialogues*, 167. For the organic-growth argument, see Hume’s *Dialogues*, Part VII.

⁴⁸ Later, in June 1841, Darwin would have seen a similar description of the slow development of ship construction in the Scotsman William Robertson’s *History of America*, 2 vols. (London: W. Strahan, 1777), 1: 2, 4, 21. “Darwin’s Reading Notebooks,” 464.

Seven months after reading Hume's *Dialogues*, Darwin opened the second volume of *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), by the Dutch-born English physician Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733).⁴⁹ He was sufficiently interested in this work to make notes on it, although these apparently have not survived.⁵⁰ No doubt Darwin turned to Mandeville's *Fable* in his quest to find a naturalistic explanation of human altruism. The book had long been notorious for its thesis that "private vices" promote "public benefits": civilized behavior had arisen because it was found to be necessary in order to gratify selfish desires. Uncensored displays of self-regard, for instance, would have been softened over time as humanity experienced the unpleasant responses such actions elicited: the long-term result would be politeness. Here, then, was Mandeville's cynical moral philosophy, a riposte to Lord Shaftsbury's theory of a "natural law" of ethics.⁵¹

Of special interest is the narrative form in which Mandeville cast his argument, for his book was an early and influential example of conjectural-historical writing. That genre often emphasized the unplanned character of human progress: Mandeville thus suggested that humans learned to be sociable mainly through unreflective imitation, "without being aware of the natural Causes, that oblige them to act as they do."⁵² To highlight this point, he compared the development of refined manners and morals to the rise of modern technology. The latter was usually considered the achievement of highly gifted individuals, but Mandeville denied this:

To Men who never turn'd their Thoughts that way, it certainly is almost inconceivable to what prodigious Height, from next to nothing, some Arts may be and have been raised by human Industry and Application, by the uninterrupted Labour, and joint Experience of many Ages, tho' none but Men of ordinary Capacity

⁴⁹ Mandeville composed the first volume of his *Fable* in poetic verse. Darwin, however, read only the second volume, which had been added as an apologetic in the form of a set of dialogues.

⁵⁰ Following Mandeville's title on his reading list, Darwin wrote "second volume extracted." "Darwin's Reading Notebooks," 459. On Darwin's method of "extracting" his readings, see the Introduction to *Charles Darwin's Marginalia*, eds. M. Di Gregorio and N. Gill, 2 vols. (New York: Garland, 1990). Darwin apparently did not own a copy of Mandeville's *Fable*, and I have not been able to locate the notes he made in the Darwin Collection at Cambridge University Library.

⁵¹ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 127–29.

⁵² Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, 2 vols. (1725; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 1: 344–47; 2: 138–39.

should ever be employ'd in them. . . . We often ascribe to the Excellency of Man's Genius, and the Depth of his Penetration, what is in Reality owing to length of Time, and the Experience of many Generations, all of them very little differing from one another in natural Parts and Sagacity.⁵³

To illustrate, Mandeville considered the development of the sailing ship. On one hand, he declared, "What a Noble as well as Beautiful, what a glorious Machine is a First-Rate Man of War, when she is under Sail, well rigg'd, and well mann'd!" On the other hand, no individual mind had conceived of that invention in advance, and even now only a few could fully understand its operations:

The Chevalier Reneau has wrote [sic] a Book, in which he shews the Mechanism of Sailing, and accounts mathematically for every thing that belongs to the working and steering of a Ship. [But] I am persuaded, that neither the first Inventors of Ships and Sailing, or those, who have made Improvements since in any Part of them, ever dream'd of those Reasons [that is, technical concepts], any more than now the rudest and most illiterate of the vulgar do, when they are made Sailors.⁵⁴

(A similar point appeared in Humphry Davy's *Consolations in Travel*: "The processes of most of the useful arts, which you call chemical, have been invented and improved without any refined views, without any general system of knowledge. Lucretius attributes to accident the discovery of the fusion of the metals [etc.]."⁵⁵)

Mandeville, in his *Fable*, then drew the comparison between seafaring technology and the civilized virtues:

I verily believe, not only that the raw Beginners, who made the first Essays in either Art, good Manners as well as Sailing, were ignorant of the true Cause, the real Foundation those Arts are built upon in Nature; but likewise that, even now both Arts are brought to great Perfection [sic], the greatest Part of those that are most expert, and daily making Improvements in them, know as little of the Rationale of them, as their Predecessors did at first.

⁵³ Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 2: 141–42.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2: 141, 143.

⁵⁵ Davy, *Consolations in Travel*, 354 (this passage appears in the fifth dialogue).

In sum, standards of civility, like improvements in ship construction, had developed in the absence of prior design: "But all this is done without reflection, and Men by degrees, and great Length of Time, fall as it were into these Things spontaneously."⁵⁶

The similarity to Hume's ship analogy is obvious, and, although it is not essential to my argument, one suspects that Hume borrowed from Mandeville on this point. We have seen Hume's remarks: "If we survey a ship, what an exalted idea must we form of the ingenuity of the carpenter, who framed so complicated, useful, and beautiful a machine?" Yet in spite of this initial impression, Hume argued, it was really more probable that the workman had been "a stupid mechanic, who imitated others, and copied an art, which, through a long succession of ages, after multiplied trials, mistakes, corrections, deliberations, and controversies, had been gradually improving."⁵⁷

Surely Darwin looked to Hume and Mandeville both when he formulated his own ship analogy. Indeed each writer contributed something essential to his picture. Both portrayed the ship as the product of cumulative historical experience—although Hume's wording seems to have been especially influential. The similarity showed already in Darwin's 1844 "Essay," which said that we should view organic forms "nearly in the same way as when we look at a great mechanical invention as the summing up of the labour, the experience, the reason, and even the blunders of numerous workmen."⁵⁸ Hume's *main* contribution, however, was to posit slowly-accumulated experience specifically as an alternative to skillful and intentional design. Even so, Hume used the ship to suggest but one of several possibilities, while Mandeville placed that image at the center of his argument. Mandeville's discussion of the sailing ship showed in far more detail how unplanned and piecemeal change could effect long-term improvement.

Mandeville's *Fable* was thus the culmination of the process by which Darwin conceived of his multi-part analogy. Darwin naturally would link the hypothetical ships he found in his readings to the real-life *Beagle*, that being his personal point of reference on the subject of maritime technology. Yet this linkage, of itself, could not have evoked the scene he had witnessed from off the coast of Tierra del Fuego: something else must have pointed toward that specific episode. Clearly, Darwin's reading of Humphry Davy had set the stage. He had already recast Davy's analogy so that the savage

⁵⁶ Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 2: 144.

⁵⁷ Hume, *Dialogues*, 167.

⁵⁸ Darwin, *Foundations of the Origin of Species*, 189.

represented the design theorist. Reading Hume and Mandeville brought the final imaginative leap: instead of having the savage observe steam-driven machinery, Darwin had that figure observe a sailing ship. He thus came full circle to his own shipboard experience.

FIGURE 1

CHRONOLOGY OF RELEVANT ENTRIES
FROM DARWIN'S LIST OF "BOOKS READ"

1837	
Early summer	Erasmus Darwin, <i>Zoonomia</i>
1838	
June	Lord Kames, <i>Sketches on the History of Man</i>
August 24–26	Dugald Stewart essay on Adam Smith
Sept.	Sir Walter Scott, autobiography
Sept. 28	Thomas R. Malthus, <i>Essay on the Principle of Population</i>
Nov.	<i>Darwin's Notebook</i> : "The Savage admires not a steam engine"
Nov.–Dec.	<i>Darwin's Notebook</i> : "the surviving one of 10,000 trials"
1839	
Feb.	Humphry Davy, <i>Consolation in Travel</i>
March	Erasmus Darwin, <i>Zoonomia</i> (a re-reading)
Sept.	David Hume, <i>Dialogues concerning Natural Religion</i>
1840	
April	Bernard Mandeville, <i>Fable of the Bees</i> (vol. 2)
1841	
May	David Hume, <i>Collected Essays</i>
1842	
Summer	<i>Darwin's "Pencil Sketch"</i> includes his first recorded use of the savage-and-ship analogy

V. THE ROLE OF CONJECTURAL HISTORY

The broader intellectual context surrounding Darwin's ship analogy was provided by eighteenth-century conjectural-historical writings, chiefly by the Scotsmen Henry Home (Lord Kames), Dugald Stewart, and David Hume (his collected essays). Reading these works would have prepared Darwin to see Mandeville's *Fable* in a particular light, not just as skeptical social philosophy but also as a way of understanding the path of historical development. In turn, more than merely helping Darwin to formulate an *illustration* of natural selection, the Scottish historical vision likely helped to shape the way he thought about natural selection itself—especially in relation to theistic design. The notebooks show that Darwin viewed the selection process thus: adaptation resulted from “ten thousand trials” and the “trying of a hundred schemes of structure, in the course of ages.”⁵⁹ This scenario paralleled what Darwin had already seen in works of philosophical history. He left no commentary on these readings that directly indicates this linkage, yet the similarity between the themes in those texts and views he expressed in his own works suggests that one likely influenced the other.

The conjectural historians sought to reconstruct the “natural history” of society by providing plausible explanations of how elaborate customs and complex institutions could have developed from simple beginnings.⁶⁰ Although these accounts were speculative, they avoided sheer invention by emphasizing continuously-acting causes and deriving the most likely results. Darwin was already oriented toward this approach via his affinity for Charles Lyell's uniformitarian geology, which downplayed “catastrophic” interventions.⁶¹ Indeed, in this sense, *The Origin of Species* was itself a work of conjectural history.

We are interested especially in an ironic dual thesis that characterized this genre. On one hand, the Scottish thinkers cited intelligible causes: they regarded the laws of human nature and of material existence as history's

⁵⁹ *Darwin's Notebooks*, Macculloch Abstract 58.

⁶⁰ For a useful overview, see Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 150–58, 174–80.

⁶¹ Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, 11th edition, 2 vols. (1830–33; New York: Appleton, 1887), 1: 1–2. On Lyell's conjectural method, see Roy Porter, “Charles Lyell and the Principles of the History of Geology,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 9 (1976): 91–103, on 94–97.

mainspring.⁶² On the other hand, they saw historical experience as lacking any rational plan. Past ages had stumbled upon arrangements that improved civilization, even as the actors themselves pursued only proximate ends. This latter theme was especially common.⁶³ It should be noted, however, that Darwin did not become acquainted with this idea specifically via the famous “invisible hand” thesis from Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776): there is no evidence that he read that work.⁶⁴ Yet he still would have been familiar with the concept, which was generally accepted among Victorian England’s Whig middle class.⁶⁵

It was the Scots’ special genius to regard the two themes just described as mutually supportive: invoking the non-rational character of the historical process was itself a mode of rational explanation. Significantly, both emphases appeared in works Darwin read in the months before he began to formulate his natural selection theory, that is, in the summer and early fall of 1838 (see Figure 1).⁶⁶ First, Lord Kames’s *Sketches on the Early History of Man* (1774) argued that humanity’s socio-economic development had been propelled by population pressure on food supply—this already a widely-discussed issue prior to Malthus’s famous essay.⁶⁷ Here, then, was the element of law-like necessity. Yet Kames also emphasized unintended outcomes. In describing the origins of animal domestication (a

⁶² Karen O’Brien, “Between Enlightenment and Stadiac Theory: William Robertson and the History of Europe,” *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 16 (1994): 53–63, especially 55.

⁶³ Ronald Hamowy, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985); Robert Wokler, “Anthropology and Conjectural History in the Enlightenment,” in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, eds. Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 31–52; and Christopher J. Berry, *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 33, 40–42, 47.

⁶⁴ The idea of Smith’s influence on Darwin appears, for example, in Stephen Jay Gould, “Darwin and Paley Meet the Invisible Hand,” in *Eight Little Piggies: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton: 1993), 138–52. For a response to this thesis, see Hodge, *Companion to Darwin*, 64. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), book iv, part ii.

⁶⁵ On Smith’s “hand” thesis as a gloss on Mandeville’s paradox, see Jon Elster, *Logic and Society: Contradictions and Possible Worlds* (Chilchester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 1978), 107; and Hamowy, *Theory of Spontaneous Order*, 9.

⁶⁶ “Darwin’s Reading Notebooks,” 455, 458, 462.

⁶⁷ An undated notebook entry (*Darwin’s Notebooks*, C257) indicates that Darwin read “Home’s History of Man at Maer,” the estate of his relatives the Wedgwoods. This visit probably came in mid-June, when Darwin was en route to his family home at Shrewsbury, prior to proceeding to Scotland for a geological survey of Glen Roy. “Appendix II: Chronology 1837–43,” in *Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, 4: 430–37, on 431–32.

subject to which Darwin would have paid close attention), he suggested that this practice would have “crept” into common use, unbeknownst even to the participants themselves. The latter would not have realized that they were taking the first steps toward creating a pastoral economy, thus inaugurating a new stage in the development of civilization.⁶⁸

Also at this time, Darwin read a 1793 essay by the Edinburgh philosopher Dugald Stewart, a commemoration of the life and work of Adam Smith.⁶⁹ Included here was a classic description of conjectural-historical methodology. Neither Smith nor Stewart was interested in the extraordinary events found in traditional historical narratives; rather, each assumed for the sake of rational explanation that a nation’s institutions had developed through incremental improvements, beginning from a state of unimproved nature.⁷⁰ What is especially striking is the way Stewart’s characterization of this procedure resembles Darwin’s critique of the theistic design idea. Even when the historical record was far from complete, said Stewart, “if we can show, from the known principles of human nature, how [an institution] . . . might have arisen . . . *a check is given to that indolent philosophy, which refers to a miracle, whatever appearances, both in the natural and moral worlds, it is unable to explain.*”⁷¹ Resort to a miracle, or any other special intervention, was a mark of intellectual laziness, betraying an inability to provide a real explanation. This of course was precisely the kind of thinking for which Darwin faulted the natural theologians.

A further work that Darwin read in this period epitomized our dual thematic. In his memoirs, Sir Walter Scott praised the lectures on law he had attended while a student at the University of Edinburgh: “I can never sufficiently admire the penetration and clearness of conception which were necessary to the arrangement of the fabric of [Scottish] law, formed originally under the strictest influence of feudal principles, and innovated, altered, and broken in upon by the change of times, of habits, and of manners.” Taming this body of knowledge required “combining the past state of our legal enactments with the present, and tracing clearly and judi-

⁶⁸ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, 4 vols. (1774; Edinburgh: William Creech, 1788), 1:91.

⁶⁹ According to *Darwin’s Notebooks*, M108, Darwin’s reading of Stewart’s essay can be dated about 25 or 26 August 1838.

⁷⁰ We can infer from *Darwin’s Notebooks*, E4–6, that Darwin took this aspect of Stewart’s vision to heart.

⁷¹ Dugald Stewart, “Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith,” in Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. I. S. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 269–332, on 292–93, emphasis added.

ciously the changes which took place, and the causes which led to them."⁷² Paradoxically, one could make rational sense of such data only by taking into account its tortuous history. Darwin suggested a similar procedure via his natural selection theory, especially as embodied in the ship analogy.

These themes were summarized once again in David Hume's collected essays, which Darwin read in the spring of 1841. In "The Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," Hume called for historical explanation to be based on the identifiable laws of human nature, stressing the superiority of such accounts to those that focused on chance events. The latter, he said, precluded further inquiry and led to a "state of ignorance."⁷³ Then, in his essay "On Government," Hume noted that the rise of civic institutions had not emerged from any grand scheme:

But though this progress of human affairs may appear certain and inevitable, and though the support which allegiance to justice be founded on obvious principles of human nature [sic], it cannot be expected that men should beforehand be able to discover them, or foresee their operation. Government commences more casually and more imperfectly.⁷⁴

Darwin read these remarks well after he had formulated his natural selection theory, and also after he had read Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*. Still, Hume's essays must have reinforced themes that he had seen in this and other works of philosophical history.

VI. CONCLUSION: MORE THAN SIMPLE REPLACEMENT

It is often said that Darwin replaced the idea of special creation with his theory of natural selection, and in a sense this is true: natural selection took over the explanatory functions supplied by the Creator in design theory. Stephen Jay Gould thus analyzed the parallel arguments used by Boyle and Paley, on the one hand, and Darwin, on the other, showing how Darwin

⁷² John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 3 vols. (1837–38; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1881), 1: 84. "Darwin's Reading Notebooks," 456.

⁷³ Hume quoted in Berry, *Scottish Enlightenment*, 54–60, 66.

⁷⁴ David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (1742; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 37. On the theme of spontaneous development in Hume's writings, see Duncan Forbes, "'Scientific' Whiggism: Adam Smith and John Millar," *The Cambridge Journal* 7 (1954): 643–70, on 654.

“kept the phenomenology and inverted the explanation” of adaptive structures. Abigail Lustig similarly describes Darwin’s “inside-out transformation of natural theology into evolutionary biology,” with natural selection “replacing Paley’s God.” Alternatively, regarding this transformation as an effort to *reform* natural theology, John Cornell argues that Darwin “did not so much deny the notion of God’s intelligent construction of particular ‘living machines’ as simply replace it with the idea of the intelligent ordering of general phenomena”—that is, with the idea of designed laws of nature.⁷⁵

Although these formulations supply useful starting points, they hide from view Darwin’s further conceptual move. In the aftermath of the *Beagle* voyage, when he first embraced transmutationism, Darwin indeed had wanted to replace belief in special creation with evidence pointing to rational laws governing (evolutionary) species formation. Yet even at this early stage, prior to coming up with the natural selection principle, he had seen the need for a theory that joined creative force with unpredictable outcomes. Did anything prepare him to view organic evolution in this light? Works he had read in previous months supplied concrete examples of how slow and unguided change could bring about the same sorts of ordered development as did preplanned design. The sailing ship well illustrated this idea because its history manifestly was one of very gradual improvement from simple beginnings. More than just an evolved technology, it fit within the same category as the many complex social institutions described by the Scottish historical writers. This was a scenario that a newer invention such as the steam engine, or even the telescope, could not quite capture.

Recently, a number of historians have shown that Darwin held to a German-romanticist idea of nature, this starting even before his *Beagle* voyage and continuing for the remainder of his career. Phillip R. Sloan, David Kohn, and Robert J. Richards have argued convincingly that Darwin did not view nature the way most of his English peers did, as a quasi-mechanical realm. For although he accepted the Paleyan problematic of seeking to account for adaptations, he was not obliged to retain Paley’s mechanistic vision; rather, he viewed natural selection as an actively creative process. This romanticist celebration of nature provided an overarching framework within which Darwin developed his specific evolutionary ideas.⁷⁶ The Scot-

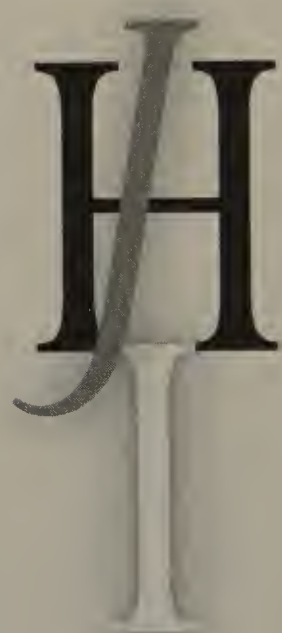
⁷⁵ Stephen Jay Gould, “On Transmuting Boyle’s Law to Darwin’s Revolution,” in *Evolution, Society, Science, and the Universe*, ed. A. C. Fabian (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4–27, on 8; Lustig, “Natural Aetheology,” 72, 75; Cornell, “God’s Magnificent Law,” 388.

⁷⁶ Kohn, “Darwin’s Ambiguity,” 234–36; Phillip R. Sloan, “‘The Sense of Sublimity’: Darwin on Nature and Divinity,” *Osiris* 16 (2001): 251–69; Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago:

tish historical outlook described in the present essay would have fit quite comfortably within that framework, even while adding something that neither it, nor Darwin's Humean skepticism about design, nor his law-of-nature emphasis, could themselves provide. Although it is unlikely that Darwin modeled his selection theory on conjectural history in a consciously reflective way, his repeated exposure to and obvious affinity for that genre of writing would nevertheless have helped to mold the narrative structure of his theory.

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The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 514–54. See also: Philip R. Sloan, "Darwin, Vital Matter, and Transformism of Species," *Journal of the History of Biology* 19 (1986): 369–445.



The Pointsman: Maxwell's Demon, Victorian Free Will, and the Boundaries of Science

Matthew Stanley

The railway pointsman was the vigilant employee shifting tracks and posting signals to route hurtling trains safely on their way. In a twelve-hour shift in 1880, a pointsman might pull two thousand levers.¹ Their daily life was governed by “reliability, service, and coolness.”² The power of the railway pointsman began in his disciplined mind and ended in the placement of his hands on the correct levers. In this, he replicated a critical assumption of Victorian religious and social thought: conscious free-will. As the human body would only act when prodded to do so by the soul, the signalman would move physically only after deliberate decisions.³

But the Victorian period also saw tremendous advances in science that made many doubt the truth of the pointsman's power. The march of physics through the conquered territories of mechanics, thermodynamics, and electricity, and biology's beachhead in the nervous system and mind, all seemed

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¹ Frank McKenna, *The Railway Workers 1840–1870* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 65–78.

² *Ibid.*, 76.

³ The terms “pointsman,” “switchman,” and “signalman” were all “broadly interchangeable.” P. W. Kingsford, *Victorian Railwaymen: The Emergence and Growth of Railway Labour 1830–1870* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1970), 91.

to herald the victory of a materialist, mechanical worldview. In this view all phenomena can and should be explained solely with recourse to matter and motion, implying a harsh determinism: the behavior of everything made of atoms, including humans, was strictly determined only by their current physical state. The appropriate railway metaphor here was not the pointsman, but rather the train itself, carried forward by momentum and uncaring for trivialities such as humans in its way. Like the future events of a materialist universe, the path of the train was fixed by the shackles of the track.

Whether or not the success of science demanded humans forfeit their intuition of individual volition was a major intellectual crisis of the Victorian period. Both Christian doctrine and simple social responsibility needed humans to be able to control their own actions and accept responsibility for them. But was this tenable in light of daily leaps forward in science? Much hope rested in the metaphor of the pointsman, a tiny figure who through cunning and forethought could master the overwhelming force of physical determinism.

One of its chief proponents was the devout Christian physicist James Clerk Maxwell, best known for his epochal work in electromagnetism and statistical mechanics.⁴ In one letter he invoked it thus:

There is action and reaction between body and soul, but it is not of a kind in which energy passes from one to the other,—as . . . when a pointsman shunts a train it is the rails that bear the thrust.⁵

This was in the context of theological problems surrounding the nature of the soul. But note that Maxwell uses nearly identical language here:

In this way the temperature of B may be raised and that of A lowered without any expenditure of work, but only by the intelligent action of a mere guiding agent (like a pointsman on a railway with

⁴ For other scientists' use of railway metaphors, see David B. Wilson, "A Physicist's Alternative to Materialism: The Religious Thought of George Gabriel Stokes," in *Energy and Entropy*, ed. Patrick Brantlinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). Max Weber invoked railways to explain how religion could make large-scale changes in history. Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 280.

⁵ James Clerk Maxwell to Lewis Campbell, April 21 1862, in *Scientific Letters and Papers of James Clerk Maxwell*, ed. P. M. Harman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) (hereafter *SLP*), 1: 711–12.

perfectly acting switches who should send the express along one line and the goods along another).⁶

This was in a quite different context, a discussion of the laws of thermodynamics. The pointsman as described here would receive the peculiar name of “Maxwell’s demon,” a thought experiment that has survived to this day as a tool in statistical mechanics.⁷ The image of the pointsman was used by Maxwell to solve not just religious difficulties but scientific ones as well.

Other work has noted this parallelism but this essay will consider this shared metaphor in detail, particularly in light of Maxwell’s religious context and personal religiosity.⁸ What was the overlap of conceptual space that made this a reasonable project in both religion and science? I will argue both instantiations of the pointsman indicate a deeper concern of Maxwell’s: the danger of mistaking observed regularity for a true scientific law. And more generally, the danger of solely materialist explanations in science. The pointsman was a tool by which Maxwell hoped to remind investigators to tread carefully in declaring something to be proven by science.

To Maxwell a correct understanding of free will, as personified in the pointsman, was essential to clear conceptions of both man as a religious creature and of the limits of science. Understanding human volition, then, was not an end unto itself. It was a foundation on which one could build reliable theories of man and matter.

I. THE PROBLEM

Born in Scotland to a family of mixed religious heritage, Maxwell was raised in both the Anglican and Presbyterian traditions.⁹ His religious atti-

⁶ Maxwell to John William Strutt, December 6 1870. *SLP*, 2: 582–84.

⁷ The general story of the demon is also told in Martin J. Klein, “Maxwell, His Demon, and the Second Law of Thermodynamics,” *American Scientist* 58 (1970): 85–97; Edward Daub, “Maxwell’s Demon,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 1 (1970): 213–27; and P. M. Heimann, “Molecular Forces, Statistical Representation and Maxwell’s Demon,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 1 (1970): 189–211.

⁸ Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking 1820–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 194–208; Crosbie Smith, *The Science of Energy: A Cultural History of Energy Physics in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 249–51; and P. M. Harman, *The Natural Philosophy of James Clerk Maxwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 197–208.

⁹ Paul Theerman, “James Clerk Maxwell and Religion,” *American Journal of Physics* 54 (1986): 312–17, 312. Also Smith, *The Science of Energy*, chapter 11.

tudes early in life appeared quite conventional, if somewhat more tolerant. Maxwell was a student in primary school during the aftermath of the Disruption, a massive split in Scottish Christianity driven by the swelling ranks of those with evangelical outlooks.¹⁰ The struggles around the emergence of the Free Church were a prominent issue in the Maxwell household and young James' father chose his teachers carefully lest the young boy be swept up in the ferment.¹¹ They were quite literally in the heart of the religious schism: the Maxwells attended St. Andrews Church, the very building that sheltered the General Assembly that led to the Disruption.¹² We do not know how much direct exposure Maxwell had to evangelicalism in his early life but it is clear such ideas began to exert a strong influence on him soon after his arrival as a student at Cambridge in 1850.

Evangelical Christianity was not a separate sect, but rather a cross-denominational movement reconceptualizing the relationship of God and man through individual reflection and action.¹³ In evangelicalism man was naturally depraved via original sin and was wholly other from the divine. Life was the opportunity to prove one's morality through the exercise of free will to choose a godly life over a worldly one. The individual conscience was the critical element: evangelicalism discarded Calvinist predestination in favor of an emphasis on man's free ability to accept God's offered grace.

During the summer of 1853 Maxwell prepared for the rigors of the Mathematics Tripos exam at the residence of a friend's uncle (an evangelical rector).¹⁴ He fell ill and collapsed while studying, leading to an intense conversion experience. Maxwell emerged from this with a fierce evangelical faith. Writing to his host afterward, he described his new religious outlook:

[A]ll the evil influences that I can trace have been internal and not external, you know what I mean—that I have the capacity of being

¹⁰ See Stewart Brown and Michael Fry, eds., *Scotland in the Age of Disruption* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Lewis Campbell and William Garnett, *The Life of James Clerk Maxwell* (London: Macmillan, 1882), 420. Hereafter *Life*.

¹² C. W. F. Everitt, "Maxwell's Scientific Creativity," *Springs of Scientific Creativity*, eds. Rutherford Aris et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 71–141, 114.

¹³ On evangelicalism see David W. Bebbington, et al., eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). On evangelicalism's relation to science, see David N. Livingstone et al., *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ *Life*, 169–71

more wicked than any example that man could set me, and that if I escape, it is only by God's grace helping me to get rid of myself, partially in science, more completely in society,—but not perfectly except by committing myself to God as the instrument of His will, not doubtfully, but in the certain hope that that Will will be plain enough at the proper time.¹⁵

Maxwell's newfound evangelical stance was quite clear: a depraved human nature and a complete reliance on divine grace. The dominant thought of this passage was the statement of Maxwell's acceptance of the overwhelming importance of a correct understanding of God's will. The evangelical outlook required a God who provided grace as a free choice and humans who acknowledged that free choice through exercise of their own will.

That summer Maxwell threw himself into reading to better understand his new faith. He devoured sermons of all kinds, including F. D. Maurice's *Theological Essays*, which were soon accused of heresy.¹⁶ He did not, apparently, agree with all of Maurice's ideas, but the controversial theologian's emphasis on social activism resonated with Maxwell's own paternalist attitudes.¹⁷

Of particular significance was Maurice's emphasis on the role of human will. The exercise of the choice between love and selfishness was always a reflection of the divine will—volition was a route to submission to God's higher plan.¹⁸ The ability to choose to trust God was a critical element in Maurice's scheme, and was also an important aspect of Maxwell's own understanding of his conversion experience.¹⁹ This choice freed Christians from their worldly prison of "mere Fate or Necessity," giving them the power to live extraordinary lives as agents of God.²⁰ On this specific issue Maurice fit well with the Victorian religious mainstream which celebrated will as a source of both human strength and weakness, but always as a path to submitting to a higher power.²¹

An important part of Maxwell's religious development was his time as

¹⁵ Maxwell to C. B. Tayler, July 8 1853, *SLP*, 2: 220–21, on 221. On February 20 1853 Maxwell wrote that he could not apprehend evil with rational means, which suggests a more emotional approach to religion. See *Life*, 182–83.

¹⁶ *Life*, 191–92.

¹⁷ Maxwell to Lewis Campbell, September 15 1853, in *Life*, 192.

¹⁸ John R. Reed, *Victorian Will* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989), 21, 42.

¹⁹ Maxwell to C. B. Tayler, July 8 1853. *SLP*, 2: 220–21, on 221.

²⁰ Frederick Denison Maurice, *Theological Essays* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1853), 424–25.

²¹ Reed, *Victorian Will*, 11–16, 38–39.

a member of the Cambridge discussion group known as the Apostles. One of his first essays for the Apostles revealed his earliest thinking on the impact of scientific developments on the Christian doctrine of free will.²² One of the difficulties in maintaining the idea of an independent soul capable of guiding human action was the problem of determinism. In its modern form this problem goes back at least to David Hume, and appears under several different names. Briefly, it states that all events in the world are caused by physical causes (or natural laws), which admit of no exceptions, and thus all future events are in principle pre-determined by the current state of the world.²³ The difficulty rests in whether this applies only to physical phenomena or to mental and spiritual phenomena as well. Victorian society's basic assumption was that the soul, divinely created and endowed, was qualitatively different from the crude matter around it and was thus exempt from determinism. That is, the soul and the will could act freely without being conditioned by prior causes.²⁴ The mystery of how the soul drove the body gave rise to detailed analyses, but was accepted as obviously true.

Retaining faith in this simple exceptionalism became increasingly difficult for Maxwell's generation. Previously, the danger of materialism and mind was seen as largely a political issue stemming from the French Revolution.²⁵ But this threat took on a new cast with the impressive success of natural philosophy, particularly physics, in the middle of the nineteenth century. This made the idea of inescapable natural laws even more convincing. There were specific dangers as well. From Maxwell's essay:

²² Jordi Cat, "On Understanding: Maxwell on the Methods of Illustration and Scientific Metaphor," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Modern Physics* 32 (2001), 395–441.

²³ Reed, *Victorian Will*, 31–35. "Determinism" has several possible meanings, the distinctions among which are beyond the scope of this paper. See *The Empire of Chance: How Probability Changed Science and Everyday Life*, eds. Gerd Gigerenzer et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 276–82.

²⁴ For the free will debates in Victorian culture and thought see Reed, *Victorian Will*; L. S. Jacyna, "The Physiology of Mind, the Unity of Nature, and the Moral Order in Victorian Thought," *British Journal for the History of Science* 14 (1981): 109–32; Rick Ryland, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25–45; Lorraine Daston, "The Theory of Will versus the Science of Mind," and Kurt Danziger, "Mid-Nineteenth Century British Psycho-physiology: A Neglected Chapter in the History of Psychology," in *The Problematic Science: Psychology in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, eds. William Woodward and Mitchell Ash (New York: Praeger, 1982), 88–118, and 119–46, respectively.

²⁵ See the statement of William Hamilton (one of Maxwell's teachers) in Ryland, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture*, 45.

When we consider voluntary actions in general, we think we see causes acting like forces on the willing being. Some of our motions arise from physical necessity, some from irritability or organic excitement, some are performed by our machinery without our knowledge, and some evidently are due to us and our volitions. Of these, again, some are merely a repetition of a customary act, some are due to the attractions of pleasure or the pressure of constrained activity, and a few show some indications of being the results of distinct acts of the will.²⁶

By the late 1850s, it seemed perhaps the human will was not quite so different from the material world than had been supposed. The work of Hermann Helmholtz and colleagues (which Maxwell was quite familiar with) began to provide dramatic evidence the human mind was subject to the same laws as the material world.²⁷ It seemed that animals, including humans, were constrained by the same energy laws that explained steam engines and waterwheels.

At the same time, a number of philosophical systems began to appear explaining the workings of the human nervous system and mind, and they made no recourse to the traditional freely-acting soul. Maxwell read widely, and there were a handful of figures who likely stimulated his thinking on the problem of volition. First was Herbert Spencer, who in 1855 challenged a number of classic assumptions about the will: "all actions whatever must be determined by those psychical connections which experience has generated . . . in his constitution."²⁸ Second, Maxwell's reference to pleasure and repetition suggests familiarity with Alexander Bain's early work which argued for volition being dependent on actual physical changes to the brain caused by a repeated activity seeking pleasure or avoiding pain.²⁹ It is well known that during this period Maxwell read Henry Buckle, who sought to explain all of human history by appeal to natural laws and denied that

²⁶ "Are there real analogies in nature?" *Life*, 240.

²⁷ On Helmholtz, see *Hermann von Helmholtz and the Foundations of Nineteenth Century Science*, ed. David Cahan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Robert M. Brain and M. Norton Wise, "Muscles and Engines: Indicator Diagrams and Helmholtz's Graphical Methods," in *The Science Studies Reader*, ed. Mario Biagioli (New York: Routledge, 1999).

²⁸ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Psychology* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855), 617. See also Reed, *Victorian Will*, 119, 500–504.

²⁹ On Bain see Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture*, chapter 5.

consciousness was an exception to the uniformity of nature. While his analysis was only applied to large groups, his assumptions were quite deterministic: "If . . . I had a complete knowledge both of [a man's] disposition and of all the events by which he was surrounded, I should be able to foresee the line of conduct which, in consequence of those events, he would adopt."³⁰ And although he denied that his work circumscribed the will, William Carpenter's arguments that the reflex action could work without conscious intervention seemed to suggest that many of the higher functions of the mind were automatic.³¹ These figures were not alone, and the 1850s marked the beginning of decades of vigorous debate on the subject of the will.

Maxwell had no doubts about the reality of the will, but he acknowledged contemporary developments in psycho-physiology and reflex action made it no longer tenable to claim that only the will was responsible for human behavior. "Some had supposed that in will they had found the only true cause, and that all physical causes are only apparent. I need not say that this doctrine is exploded."³²

Near the end of the essay Maxwell cautioned that a natural philosopher must be careful not to generalize so broadly as to mistake one thing for another. His warning was one that reappeared several times in his career in different forms, and in different contexts. "[I]f we are going to study the constitution of the individual mental man, and draw all our arguments from the laws of society on the one hand, or those of the nervous tissue on the other, we may chance to convert useful helps into Wills-of-the-wisp."³³ The physiology of nerves and the behavior of societies were important topics that Maxwell thought deserved serious investigation, but they were incomplete. Without including the human will as a real and efficacious entity, one could mistake those scientific approximations for absolute truth and be led down a dangerous path.

II. ESCAPING THE DETERMINIST PRISON

However, Maxwell had no interest in circumventing the conservation of energy or the breakthroughs of experimental physiology. This was a genu-

³⁰ Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England* (London: J. W. Parker and Sons, 1857), 17–18, and Reed, *Victorian Will*, 97–102.

³¹ William Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology* (London: John Churchill, 1842), and "The Automatic Execution of Voluntary Movements" (1850), in William Carpenter, *Nature and man* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1888), 164–68.

³² "Are there real analogies in nature?" *Life*, 240.

³³ *Ibid.*, 243.

ine dilemma with which he would grapple for the rest of his life. He was searching for some synthesis that would acknowledge the power of natural laws while retaining the possibility of man's free choice of God over sin. In an 1857 letter to his friend Lewis Campbell he described how he presented this issue to his students:

I have to tell my men that all they see, and their own bodies, are subject to laws which they cannot alter, and that if they wish to do anything they must work according to those laws, or fail, and therefore we study the laws. You have to say that what men are and the nature of their actions depends on the state of their wills, and that by God's grace, through union with Christ, the contradictions and false action of those wills may be settled and solved, so that one way lies perfect freedom, and the other way bondage under the devil, the world, and the flesh, and therefore you entreat them to give heed to the things which they have heard.³⁴

Another letter to Campbell in 1862 shows Maxwell's initial attempts to deal with the problem without discarding established science. Praising Helmholtz, Maxwell admitted that it was now clear that human bodies could be thought of as machines running on food for fuel. These implications of the conservation of energy showed that "the soul is not the direct moving force of the body. If it were, it would only last till it had done a certain amount of work, like the spring of a watch, which works till it is run down. The soul is not the mere mover."³⁵ He was careful to distinguish the soul from a mere reservoir of energy. Once this was made clear, the concern that it could be "used up" was negated and the possibility an eternal existence in heaven was retained.³⁶

The problem of how a non-energetic soul could meaningfully guide the body remained, though. If it could not exert force, how could it intervene in the body's actions? Having disposed of the crude notion that the soul powered the body, Maxwell argued that the solution was to be found in a more subtle model of the mind-body relationship:

There is action and reaction between body and soul, but it is not of a kind in which energy passes from one to the other,—as when

³⁴ Maxwell to Lewis Campbell, December 22 1857, in *Life*, 294.

³⁵ Maxwell to Campbell, April 21 1862, *SLP*, 1: 711–12, 712.

³⁶ This concern was widespread. See John Ruskin, "Unto this Last" (1862), in *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903–12), 1: 29–30.

a man pulls a trigger it is the gunpowder which projects the bullet, or when a pointsman shunts a train it is the rails that bear the thrust. But the constitution of our nature is not explained by finding out what it is not. It is well that it will go, and that we remain in possession, though we do not understand it.³⁷

The human will can act, not like an engine pushing a load, but as a delicate force that initiates a larger process, like a pebble starting an avalanche. Critically, both of the metaphors Maxwell uses here are events initiated by a conscious actor—a man pulls the trigger, a pointsman shunts a train. Note the ending statement of simple faith in his own experience of volition, perhaps an indication of the influence of his education in the Common Sense philosophy.³⁸

Maxwell was aware that all he had done was find out “what [free will] is not,” and had not found a positive solution to exactly how the will can act. But his strategy for solving the problem was made clear: find a process that begins with consciousness but does not require a significant investment of energy. This was the pointsman, though Maxwell did not yet understand how it might work. Interestingly, this letter to Campbell in which he first formulated the pointsman metaphor also mentions Rudolf Clausius’s work on heat that had stimulated Maxwell to begin revising his kinetic theory of gases. Thus the pointsman was in focus just as he tackled anew the problems of molecules and statistics, the context in which the pointsman would appear again later.

Enthusiasm for molecular explanations was not limited to those defending free will. The later part of the 1860s and 1870s saw an explosion of attempts to explain wide ranges of the natural, biological, and mental worlds through materialistic hypotheses. From T. H. Huxley’s insistence on the material basis of life, to Henry Maudsley’s reduction of the mind to the reflex action, to Bain’s argument that the mind is inescapably subject to the laws of cause and effect, the independence and reality of human volition were under sustained attack.³⁹ Many of these same scientists were also be-

³⁷ Maxwell to Campbell, April 21 1862, *SLP*, 1: 711–12.

³⁸ Richard Olson, *Scottish Philosophy and British Physics 1750–1880* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), chapter 12, discusses the influence of the Common Sense school of philosophy on Maxwell’s science.

³⁹ T. H. Huxley, “On the Physical Basis of Life,” *Fortnightly Review* 5 (1868): 129–45; Henry Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1867); Alexander Bain, “On the correlation of force and its bearing on the mind,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 16 (1867): 372–83. See also Danziger, “British Psycho-Physiology,” 134–38 and Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture*, 164–75.

coming more aggressive in explicitly challenging the truths and structures of religion. And while iconoclasts such as John Tyndall denied that they had explained away the mind, his strong determinism (“with the necessary molecular data . . . the chick might be deduced as rigorously and as logically from the egg as the existence of Neptune from the disturbances of Uranus”) and claims that consciousness had an “invariable” relationship to physics were taken to be direct blows against the soul.⁴⁰ Even Emil Du Bois-Reymond’s 1872 concession that the true nature of consciousness would never be understood scientifically was cloaked in a celebration of determinism.⁴¹ His separation of the mind into transcendental-but-impotent and material-but-active portions only reinforced the problem of how the mind could influence the body.

Maxwell’s response to these developments appeared in an 1873 essay.⁴² His argument was that philosophy, religious or otherwise, must take into account the progress of physics to understand free will.⁴³ His foundation was again the pointsman model, which stated that the soul’s power was not “motive” but rather to “regulate and direct the animal powers.”⁴⁴ The progress of physical science had caused one difficulty (humans obeyed energy physics), but that progress might also have created the solution. The steering effect of an immaterial soul—the pointsman—was made more plausible by the innovative concept of instability, which Maxwell credited to Balfour Stewart.⁴⁵

Stewart had argued that there were two kinds of mechanical systems, stable and unstable. Both could be considered as machines and obeyed the laws of mechanics, but because they were regular and calculable only stable systems had been studied closely. However, there were also unstable sys-

⁴⁰ John Tyndall, “Scope and limit of scientific materialism,” in *Fragments of Science* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1871), 109–22.

⁴¹ Emil Du Bois-Reymond, “Ueber die Grenzen des Naturerkennens,” *Reden* (Leipzig: Veit, 1886). Ernst Cassirer, *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), points to this speech as framing the determinism problem for the late nineteenth century. See also Keith Anderton, “The Limits of Science: A Social, Political, and Moral Agenda for Epistemology in Nineteenth Century Germany” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1993).

⁴² J. C. Maxwell, “Does the Progress of Physical Science Tend to Give any Advantage to the Opinion of Necessity (or Determinism) Over That of the Contingency of Events and the Freedom of the Will?”, dated February 11 1873, *SLP*, 2: 814–23 (also in *Life*, 434–44). Hereafter “Freedom.”

⁴³ “Freedom,” 815.

⁴⁴ “Freedom,” 817.

⁴⁵ Balfour Stewart and J. Norman Lockyer, “The Sun as a Type of the Material Universe. Parts I & II,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 18 (1868): 246–57, 319–27.

tems where an infinitesimal amount of energy could set a system in motion, such as when a balanced egg tipped over. Unlike deterministic stable systems, here there was “freedom of action.”⁴⁶ Stewart made a connection between the ability of an unstable system to magnify tiny forces and the problem of the will. If the human nervous system was arranged in an unstable fashion, the will could influence the entire structure with a microscopic effort. As he put it later, the inherent “incalculability” of unstable systems forced back the determinist specter: “In truth, is there not a transparent absurdity in the very thought that a man may become able to calculate his own movements, or even those of his fellow?”⁴⁷

Maxwell was delighted with this development. He argued in an anonymous review that the stable/unstable division called into question many of the fundamentals of determinism, including the notion of an unbroken causality that can be precisely understood. “In unstable systems, like antecedents do not produce like consequents; and as our knowledge is never more than an approximation to the truth, the calculation of what will take place in such a system is impossible to us.”⁴⁸ Maxwell argued that determinism was thus only plausible in processes that were stable at all times, which had been the only systems studied by physics. Science had advanced to the point where instability could be comprehended, and this tended “to remove that prejudice in favour of determinism.”⁴⁹ This was a large step toward the pointsman, but was not a complete solution. While Stewart had reduced the amount of energy needed for volition to a tiny amount, *some* was still needed, thus still requiring the soul to be either energetic or impotent. Free will remained an experiential reality, but its justification remained complicated.

The situation became even more complicated at the 1874 British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting, the site of some of the century’s most devastating attacks on free will. At this Belfast gathering Tyndall delivered his infamous naturalistic manifesto and Huxley declared that animals, including humans, should be thought of as automata—that

⁴⁶ Balfour Stewart, *The Conservation of Energy* (New York: D. Appleton, 1875), 159–60.

⁴⁷ Stewart, *Conservation*, 160–62.

⁴⁸ Anonymous, [Maxwell], “The Conservation of Energy,” *Nature* (Jan 15 1874): 198–200, on 199. Maxwell’s authorship of this review is argued for in Philip Marston, “Maxwell and creation: Acceptance, criticism, and his anonymous publication,” *American Journal of Physics* 75 (2007): 731–40.

⁴⁹ “Freedom,” 823.

is, machines governed solely by natural laws.⁵⁰ As with Tyndall he denied subscribing to fatalism, but his claim that “there is no proof that any state of consciousness is the cause of change in the motion of the matter of the organism” was unmistakable in its rejection of free will.⁵¹ Instead of being the mark of an active soul, consciousness became a mere epiphenomenon of the functioning of mechanical bodies.

Maxwell evaded automata with a development in French mathematical physics known as “singular states,” which provided a sophisticated explanation for how a particle could be diverted without energy. It was found in the 1870s that for certain differential equations (the equations which govern the motion of particles) there were sometimes peculiar points where an entire family of solutions “overlapped” and it was impossible to tell which trajectory a particle would take. Many of the mathematicians involved used these results to deal with difficult issues regarding their Catholic context in France, including free will.⁵² Maxwell quickly connected it to his own religious concerns. He interpreted these singular states to be the mechanism for his pointsman: at such a state, the laws of motion made no determination which track the metaphorical train might follow. No forces or energy would be required to affect the path of a particle:

While [the particle] is on the enveloping path it may at any instant, at its own sweet will, without exerting any force or spending any energy, go off along that one of the particular paths which happens to coincide with the actual condition of the system at that instant.

This was a dramatic improvement that removed the need for even the small amount of “trigger-work” that Stewart needed the will to perform.⁵³ At a singular state “a strictly infinitesimal force may determine the course of the

⁵⁰ T. H. Huxley, “On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and its History,” in *Science and Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1881), 199–245; Adrian Desmond, *Huxley: Evolution's High Priest* (London: Michael Joseph, 1997), 2: 51–80; Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture*, 93. On Victorian automata see M. Norton Wise, “The Gender of Automata in Victorian Britain,” in *Genesis Redux*, ed. Jessica Riskin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 163–95.

⁵¹ Huxley, “Automata,” 244.

⁵² Mary Jo Nye, “The Moral Freedom of Man and the Determinism of Nature: The Catholic Synthesis of Science and History in the *Revue des questions scientifiques*” in *British Journal for the History of Science* 9 (1976): 274–92. Also Ian Hacking, “Nineteenth Century Cracks in the Concept of Determinism,” *JHI* 44 (1983): 455–75, 464–65.

⁵³ Maxwell to Francis Galton, February 26 1879, SLP, 3: 756–58, 757.

system to any one of a finite number of equally possible paths, as the pointsman at a railway junction directs the train to one set of rails or another.”⁵⁴

This was truly the fulfillment of the promise of the pointsman. The motion of particles *could* be influenced by an entity not involved with the transfer of energy. Dynamical theory had now shown that entire future courses of events were only predictable “*in general*,” and there was clear ontological space for conscious influences.⁵⁵ Best of all, this space fell directly out of the equations of motion and thus maintained the strict validity of physics. It was “much better than the insinuation that there is something loose about the laws of nature.”⁵⁶

It seems that by this point Maxwell’s views of free will had reached a comfortable maturity, and we can now see the full message that is embodied in the pointsman. First, he reminded even his allies that the days of a completely unrestrained will were far in the past. The conservation of energy and psycho-physiology had forcefully demonstrated that humans do not have unrestricted control over their bodies.⁵⁷ The pointsman does not have complete control over the train—he can only deflect it at certain times and under certain circumstances. The train really does run on rails. Nonetheless, the pointsman is needed to get the train to a particular destination.

The problem, Maxwell said, was that investigators had not been careful about applying results from one domain of knowledge to another:

Many cultivators of the biological sciences have been impressed with the conviction that for an adequate study of their subject a thorough knowledge of dynamical science is essential. But the manner in which some of them have cut and pared at the facts in order to bring the phenomena within the range of their dynamics has tended to throw discredit on all attempts to apply dynamical methods to biology.⁵⁸

This was particularly dangerous in the case of investigating “sensation and voluntary motion” through purely psychological or neurological means. It

⁵⁴ Maxwell, “Review of *Paradoxical Philosophy*,” in *Scientific Papers of James Clerk Maxwell*, ed. W. D. Niven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890) (hereafter *SP*), 2: 760.

⁵⁵ “*Paradoxical*,” 760.

⁵⁶ Maxwell to Galton, February 26 1879, *SLP*, 3: 756–58, 757–58.

⁵⁷ “*Paradoxical*,” 760. See also Maxwell, “Hermann Ludwig Ferdinand Helmholtz,” *SP*, 2: 592–98.

⁵⁸ “Helmholtz,” 593.

was sloppy science to treat “a fact of consciousness as if it were an electrical current.”⁵⁹ The application of one kind of scientific idea to another could be immensely fruitful, but it could also be disastrous.

There were two extremes on which one could err. The first was to try to explain the emergence of consciousness from material processes. Maxwell commented satirically on such attempts: “I was dimly aware that somewhere in the vast System of Philosophy this question had been settled, because the Evolutionists are all so calm about it: but in a hasty search for it I never suspected in how quiet and unostentatious a manner the origin of myself would be accounted for.”⁶⁰ He mocked those, such as Du Bois-Reymond and von Nägeli, who postulated a continuity of consciousness beginning with the pleasure felt by the simplest entities as making the error of naïve personification.⁶¹ The problem with theories of this kind (such as Herbert Spencer’s) was that they explained away the soul.

The second extreme was to accept the existence of the soul, but then try to justify its properties in material terms. These sorts of “gross materialisations” of the soul were misguided attempts at objectivity, but were fundamentally flawed:

Science has, indeed, made some progress in clearing away the haze of materialism which clung so long to men’s notions about the soul . . . No anatomist now looks forward to being able to demonstrate my soul by dissecting it out on my pineal gland, or to determine the quantity of it by the process of double weighing.⁶²

Maxwell’s targets on this end were usually other Christians, such as John Drysdale.⁶³ He argued that such attempts either resulted in absurdities such as Isaac Taylor’s energy-producing soul or a will trapped in a materialist prison not so different from Du Bois-Reymond’s. Maxwell attacked both sides equally—anyone who argued that the soul was explainable imperiled its divine nature and role in God’s plan. He mocked the claim that the human body and soul could be treated as isolated entities: “I often catch myself, when thinking about my body or my mind, supposing that I am thinking about myself.”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ “Helmholtz,” 595–96.

⁶⁰ Maxwell, “Psychophysik,” *SLP*, 3: 604.

⁶¹ “Psychophysik,” 602.

⁶² “*Paradoxical*,” 760, 756.

⁶³ “Psychophysik,” 606–7.

⁶⁴ “Psychophysik,” 598–99.

Instead, he said, we should return to our own introspective experience as the basic evidence for volition: "I know that I exist now, and that I act, and that what I do may be right or wrong, and that whether right or wrong, it is my act, which I cannot repudiate."⁶⁵ This reminds us of the high stakes of free will for the Victorians—only a people who could freely choose their actions could be held responsible for them (both in the eyes of God and those of society). Maxwell leveled this criticism against Du Bois-Reymond's conclusion that humans had two minds, one material, deterministic, and active, and one immaterial, conscious, and impotent. "We might ask Prof. Du Bois-Reymond which of these it is that does right or wrong, and knows that it is his act, and that he is responsible for it. . . ."⁶⁶

This all left the soul in a liminal position. It was outside the *explanatory* range of science:

But as soon as we plunge into the abysmal depths of personality we get beyond the limits of science, for all science, and indeed, every form of human speech, is about objects capable of being known by the speaker and the hearer. . . . The progress of science, therefore . . . has rather tended to deepen the distinction between the visible part, which perishes before our eyes, and that which we are ourselves, and to shew that this personality, with respect to its nature as well as to its destiny, lies quite beyond the range of science.⁶⁷

But this did not mean that mind and will should be *ignored* by science. Rather, the lesson of the pointsman was that considerations of the will were crucial for keeping one from making incorrect conclusions about the application of science to humans (i.e., automatism). The will was a reality about the world that changed what conclusions were valid—if you ignore the pointsman you won't understand where the train is headed—and thus the will needed to be taken into account, not explained away.

Maxwell's understanding of the human will was not a simple import of religious dogma into his natural philosophy. He was clearly not uncritical about these issues: he rejected unsatisfactory solutions to the free will problem; accepted that humans were subject to some natural laws; and strongly condemned any naïve pairing of Christian doctrine with the sci-

⁶⁵ "Psychophysik," 607.

⁶⁶ "Paradoxical," 760–61.

⁶⁷ "Paradoxical," 762.

ence of the day.⁶⁸ Rather, the pointsman was a way of thinking about the basic experience of volition in a world of natural laws. He continually reconsidered it in light of new findings in physics and physiology, and it was modified over time. Even when incomplete, it was a resource he drew upon to shape his understanding of the problems of the limits of science. And these problems were not limited to the mysteries of volition—they were found in the realm of pistons and engines as well.

III. MOVING METAPHORS

I have traced the development of Maxwell's pointsman largely in the realm of considerations driven by his evangelical Christian values. I will now examine the other context in which the pointsman emerged: the laws of thermodynamics. Maxwell was one of the pioneers of the kinetic theory of gases, which sought to demonstrate that the observable characteristics of gases could be deduced from the hypothesis that all matter was made up of molecules in motion.

Maxwell's great innovation in this field was his application of statistical methods. He learned these techniques from social statistics, particularly Thomas Buckle's historical works. He explained that "the limitation of our faculties" made tracing individual molecules hopeless. In his earliest uses of statistical methods he emphasized the incompleteness of this kind of knowledge, although it could still provide the "moral certainty" that would be accepted by reasonable persons.⁶⁹

Maxwell achieved significant successes with his theory, notably deriving many of the observed properties of gases and providing some explanation for the interchange of heat and macroscopic movement described by the conservation of energy (also known as the first law of thermodynamics). But here I will focus on Maxwell's thinking on the second law of thermodynamics.

The second law as it was understood at the time was expressed in sev-

⁶⁸ "Paradoxical," 761; "Analogies," *SLP*, 1: 380; and Maxwell to C. J. Ellicott, November 22 1876, in *Life*, 393–95, 394.

⁶⁹ P. M. Harman, *The Natural Philosophy*, 124–29, and Theodore M. Porter, "A Statistical Survey of Gases: Maxwell's Social Physics," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 12 (1981): 77–116. For Maxwell's approach to kinetic theory see Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking 1820–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 111–26; Stephen Brush, *The Kind of Motion We Call Heat* (New York: Elsevier, 1986); and Elizabeth Garber, et al., eds., *Maxwell on Heat and Statistical Mechanics* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1995).

eral different forms: useful energy tended to dissipate; in the absence of external work heat flowed from hot to cold; or that entropy always increased in a closed system. These statements were generally based on macroscopic entities like steam engines and Maxwell was unconvinced that the microscopic perspective of kinetic theory could be fully reconciled with them.⁷⁰

He sought “to pick a hole” in the law with a novel thought experiment. In an 1867 letter he described two vessels placed in physical contact, each filled with gas at different temperatures. The second law normally predicted that the two vessels would adjust to an equilibrium temperature. Maxwell thought he had evaded this straightforward result based on a conceptual resource developed in a very different context.

Maxwell first slightly altered the setup. A diaphragm would be placed connecting the two vessels, able to open and close. “Now conceive a finite being who knows the paths and velocities of all the molecules by simple inspection but who can do no work, except to open and close a hole in the diaphragm, by means of a slide without mass.” This being would watch the motion of individual molecules and when a fast molecule approached, it would open the diaphragm and allow the molecule into the adjacent vessel. The door would be closed to prevent the passage of slow molecules, resulting in the build-up of faster molecules on one side and slower molecules on the other. The kinetic theory of gases interpreted this asymmetry as a difference in temperature, meaning heat would have flowed from cold to hot. The second law was violated with no work or energy, “only the intelligence of a very observant and neat fingered being has been employed.” There was nothing qualitatively distinct about this being, it was simply very perceptive and quick. Humans were unable to do this only due to “not being clever enough.”⁷¹ The moral of the tale was that the second law was true only in a statistical sense, and that a being with access to better measurement could circumvent it casually.

This finite being became known as “Maxwell’s Demon,” a strange but

⁷⁰ For instance, see Maxwell to J. W. Strutt, December 6 1870, *SLP*, 2: 582–83. William Thomson was particularly interested in the temporal directionality of thermodynamics. See Crosbie Smith and M. Norton Wise, *Energy and Empire* (Cambridge: University Press, 1989), 612–33. The social and cultural significance of thermodynamics is discussed in Stephen Brush, *The Temperature of History* (New York: Burt Franklin and Co., 1978); Bruce Clark, “Allegories of Victorian Thermodynamics,” *Configurations* 4 (1996): 67–90; and Greg Myers, “Nineteenth-century Popularizations of Thermodynamics and the Rhetoric of Social Prophecy,” *Energy and Entropy*, ed. Patrick Brantlinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

⁷¹ Maxwell to P. G. Tait, December 11 1867, *SLP*, 2: 328–33, 331, 332.

perhaps not implausible creation.⁷² The demon may seem more familiar to us in a later description of the same thought experiment, with the two vessels named A and B:

Provide a lid or stopper for this hole and appoint a doorkeeper, very intelligent and exceedingly quick, with microscopic eyes but an essentially finite being. . . . In this way the temperature of B may be raised and that of A lowered without any expenditure of work, but only by the intelligent action of a mere guiding agent (like a pointsman on a railway with perfectly acting switches who should send the express along one line and the goods along another).⁷³

The same metaphor that Maxwell constructed to explore the human will reappeared here inside containers of gas. Why? It is clear that in the crudest sense his use of the pointsman was, as in his discussions of the will, meant to circumvent objections that energy would be needed to achieve the desired effects. The pointsman's tasks were thus expanded to explain both volition and heat flow. But as with free will, the pointsman metaphor also signaled much larger questions about the nature of scientific explanation.

Maxwell used metaphors repeatedly in his scientific career.⁷⁴ The pointsman fits well with Jordi Cat's argument that Maxwell used metaphors primarily for illustrative, not explanatory purposes.⁷⁵ What aspects of real pointsmen was Maxwell trying to evoke, and what was he hoping to illustrate? A pointsman's job was about information (where was the train, when would it clear the tunnel) and then acting immediately on it (shift the points, pull the lever). Incredible precision and unflagging attention were

⁷² The name "demon" came from Thomson, not Maxwell. See Maxwell, "Concerning Demons," *SLP*, 3: 185–86. "Demon" has become the default title for this entity, and I will use it here. Further significance of the name "demon" is discussed in S. Schweber, "Demons, Angels and Probability: Some Aspects of British Science in the Nineteenth Century," *Physics as Natural Philosophy*, eds. Abner Simony and Herman Feshbach (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982), 319–63.

⁷³ Maxwell to J. W. Strutt, December 6 1870, *SLP*, 2: 582–83.

⁷⁴ On Maxwell's metaphors see Jordi Cat, "On Understanding: Maxwell on the Methods of Illustration and Scientific Metaphor," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Modern Physics* 32 (2001): 395–441; Mary Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966) and *Revolutions and Reconstructions in the Philosophy of Science* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

⁷⁵ Cat, "On Understanding," 424.

required, but they were still, in the end, human and finite.⁷⁶ This was exactly the image Maxwell wanted to conjure both with his demon and with volition: conscious awareness and actions based on that awareness could allow a small action (pulling a lever) to have huge consequences (the train goes south instead of west). The benefit of using a metaphor here was a straightforward one, in that it helped describe the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. The conscious observations and actions of the pointsman were intimately familiar to any human being, providing a way for Maxwell to illustrate the strange processes involved in psycho-physiology and thermodynamics.⁷⁷

The pointsman was not intended to show the unrestricted force of the will. It showed that the will could act even within a wide range of restrictions. The real pointsmen were restricted by the structure of the tracks, the momentum of the train, and the rules of the rail company. But even if an observer understood all of those things, they would still not understand how the train got from place to place without appreciating that consciousness, observation, and volition were necessary to the process. Similarly, a man of science who understood conservation of energy, the reflex action, and the dynamical theory of heat would still not be able to understand the true nature of either humans or entropy. Without an awareness of consciousness, observation, and volition they would come to incorrect conclusions about scientific laws.

Maxwell did not mean the pointsman to be a literal explanation of what was happening in either the mind or a thermodynamic chamber. Maxwell did not think that the demon was an actual human or divine intelligence. It has been claimed that the demon was a microscopic Laplacian calculator that was omniscient about the motions of molecules (i.e., God).⁷⁸

⁷⁶ See Norris Pope, "Dickens's 'The Signalman' and Information Problems in the Railway Age," *Technology and Culture* 42 (2001): 436–61. The assertion that the demon's effectiveness relies on information becomes key to many of the twentieth-century attempts to refute the demon. See John Earman and John Norton, "Exorcist XIV: The Wrath of Maxwell's Demon. Part I: From Maxwell to Szilard," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Modern Physics* 29 (1998): 435–71, and "Exorcist XIV: The Wrath of Maxwell's Demon. Part II: From Szilard to Landauer and Beyond," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Modern Physics* 30 (1999): 1–40. Some of these attempts note that the demon only functions if free will is real: Orly R. Shenker, "Maxwell's Demon and Baron Münchhausen: Free will as a 'perpetuum mobile'," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Modern Physics* 30 (1999): 347–72.

⁷⁷ Cat, "On Understanding," 425.

⁷⁸ Edward Daub, "Maxwell's Demon," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 1 (1970): 213–27, 224.

Maxwell anticipated this accusation and stated that he was willing to dispense with the intelligent aspects of the demon and turn it into a sophisticated valve.⁷⁹ Based on these passages Peter Harman states that the demon had no supernatural connotations for Maxwell.⁸⁰ Harman is clearly trying to anticipate the claim that the demon was a direct divine agent. I agree with him on this specific point, but I believe Crosbie Smith and M. Norton Wise are also correct in arguing that Maxwell did not object to *all* supernatural implications of the demon.⁸¹ That is, I think it is the case both that Maxwell did not intend the demon to be a literal description of divine actions and he did think the results of the demon thought experiment could have implications for matters that could be called “supernatural” (e.g. free will). The pointsman was not intended to provide a concrete explanation of an actual process, since there could be multiple explanations for what was going on (an intelligence or a valve). Rather it was the illustration that was important: considering carefully what intelligence can do *shows* the errors of certain kinds of reasoning.⁸² Maxwell thought that metaphors could play an important part in science, but the scientific function of the pointsman was critical, not constructive.⁸³ Instead, its job was to warn against drawing unwarranted scientific conclusions.⁸⁴

The demon was an elaboration of the pointsman model originally developed to shed light on human volition in a deterministic universe. The pointsman was, at root, an attempt to understand correctly the nature of the human will as something that could process information and act on it.⁸⁵ Maxwell was committed to such a correct understanding due to his evangelicalism, but this was not solely a religious issue. Rather, he argued that a correct understanding of free will helped us understand better both the world and our conceptions of it. In the case of the demon, understand-

⁷⁹ Maxwell to J. W. Strutt, December 6 1870, *SLP*, 2: 582–83 and “Concerning Demons,” *SLP*, 3: 185–86. Exactly how anthropomorphic the demon needs to be in order to function remains a matter of contention. See N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 43.

⁸⁰ P. M. Harman, *Energy, Force, and Matter* (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), 140.

⁸¹ Smith and Wise, *Energy and Empire*, 623.

⁸² Cat, “On Understanding,” 424, 428–29.

⁸³ Maxwell, “Address to the Mathematical and Physical Sections of the British Association,” Liverpool, September 15 1870, *SP*, 2: 215–29.

⁸⁴ Cat, “On Understanding,” 430.

⁸⁵ Smith and Wise, *Energy and Empire*, 625, argue that the demon was intended to show what was *distinctive* about conscious creatures, which is certainly an important part of Maxwell’s reasoning.

ing the power of free will showed how to question the universality of the second law. The demon itself did not have to be a supernatural being and it was intended to solve a technical problem in thermodynamics. But its function was based on a metaphor that was also part of a chain of reasoning based on manifestly religious premises. Thus the pointsman was both a scientific and religious entity, and in both realms it was intended to raise difficult questions about the knowledge available from the current state of science.

More specifically, the pointsman questioned what *level of knowledge* was available, and how that level affected the conclusions one could draw. Maxwell was concerned throughout his career with ensuring that physical laws and claims were understood properly: were they a description of a real entity, a hypothesis, a metaphor, or simply a mathematical convenience? The correct understanding of free will, as manifested in the pointsman, was one more tool for properly calibrating the level of knowledge in both science and society.

Molecular investigations appear to have particularly stimulated Maxwell's thinking on these issues. He claimed that the kinetic theory "forces on our attention the distinction between two kinds of knowledge, which we may call for convenience the Dynamical and Statistical." Dynamical knowledge could produce certainty and exact prediction, whereas statistical investigations could only address probabilities and general assertions.⁸⁶ He did not denigrate the powerful results of statistics but he did want to make clear that it generated certain "peculiarities" different from "exact science." These peculiarities were responsible for such apparent anomalies as the reversibility of astronomy while thermal phenomena remained irreversible. This meant, fundamentally, that human knowledge via statistics could only be approximate, not absolutely accurate in the manner of astronomical predictions.⁸⁷

The physical world, then, could sometimes present both puzzles and solutions that were only apparent, and that were dependent on our abilities rather than nature. In the case of the second law, processes of the natural world appeared to show regularity that the lens of statistics revealed was illusionary.⁸⁸ The intent of the demon was to demonstrate just such a situation. Maxwell asserted that the second law was "undoubtedly true as long as we can deal with bodies only in mass, and have no power of perceiving

⁸⁶ "Freedom," 818.

⁸⁷ "Freedom," 819.

⁸⁸ James Clerk Maxwell, "Molecules," *Nature* 8 (1873): 437–41. Also in *SP*, 2: 361–78.

or handling the separate molecules of which they are made up,” and used the demon to show how useful heat could be restored to a system by a being with precise, but finite, awareness.⁸⁹ Human misunderstandings of their own awareness and volition could lead to erroneous conclusions:

It follows from [the activity of the demon] that the idea of dissipation of energy depends on the extent of our knowledge. . . . A memorandum book does not, provided it is neatly written, appear confused to an illiterate person, or to the owner who understands it thoroughly, but to any other person able to read it appears to be inextricably confused. Similarly the notion of dissipated energy could not occur to a being who could not turn any of the energies of nature to his own account, or to one who could trace the motion of every molecule and seize it at the right moment. It is only to a being in the intermediate stage, who can lay hold of some forms of energy while others elude his grasp, that energy appears to be passing inevitably from the available to the dissipated state.⁹⁰

The demon, as an application of the concept of the pointsman, showed dramatically how we can be fooled into seeing laws of nature where they do not truly exist.

Similarly, Maxwell thought materialists such as Huxley had fooled themselves into seeing laws of nature where there were none. He was concerned with the consequences of their ideas in the religious realm, but the wider application of the pointsman shows us that his critique was a deeper one. He was arguing that they had mistaken some regularities of nature (e.g., the function of the nervous system) for absolute laws (human automatism). This error came from paying too much attention to energy and motion and not enough to personality and the experience of the divine. With the pointsman he argued that understanding how volition could work even in a world of natural laws would have prevented the materialists from reifying erroneous conclusions based on their limited agnostic perspectives. Maxwell asserted that thinking of humans simply as machines was a choice: “Either be a machine and see nothing but ‘phenomena,’ or else try to be a man, feeling, your life interwoven, as it is, with many others, and strengthened by them whether in life or death.”⁹¹ One could either accept the reality

⁸⁹ James Clerk Maxwell, *Theory of Heat* (London: Longmans, 1872), 308–9.

⁹⁰ Maxwell, “Diffusion,” article for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, SP, 2: 625–46, 646.

⁹¹ Maxwell to R. B. Litchfield, September 23 1857. *Life*, 281.

of our experience of volition or discard it, but rejecting that reality was asserting a particular boundary to science. And to Maxwell, the materialists had picked the wrong one. They asserted that consciousness was an object to be explained, rather than a cause to be taken into account. This neglect of the everyday experience of consciousness poisoned their analyses and thus they became convinced of the absolute truth of biological laws (that humans were automata) that were only approximately true.

The parallel use of the pointsman in his analyses of the second law shows that Maxwell thought an incorrect understanding of the will could have consequences in physics as well. The pointsman performed an analogous task here to its role in religion. It was a call to observers that they were focusing on the wrong level of analysis. For Maxwell, a correct understanding of the mind and the will affected how one saw the world. In science, that determined which laws of nature one could see. In society, it determined whether man was moral and responsible for his own actions. Decision making was one of the fundamental problems of metaphysics, and misunderstanding it could have dramatic consequences in all aspects of human thought from molecules to morality. The pointsman did not just guide molecules in motion; he also guided the physicist to a better understanding of the world.

CONCLUSION

Maxwell's pointsman was a reminder of the need to draw correct boundaries, in two related senses. First, the limits of science itself vis-à-vis human consciousness. Science cannot encompass consciousness, or it becomes explained away. Solely materialist approaches to the human mind might seem self-consistent but were ultimately self-defeating. But science cannot ignore consciousness either, or it wanders into philosophical dead-ends. Thus consciousness and free will sit precisely on the boundary of science. Science must acknowledge the existence and possible effect of consciousness, but cannot seek to explain it.

This leads directly to the second type of boundary, the one between different kinds of scientific explanation: statistical versus dynamical, or limited versus absolute. Some scientific conclusions were true only in an approximate sense, not a fundamental one. Humans do obey some of the same laws as machines, and entropy usually does increase. But we can be fooled into thinking those approximations are *really* true if we do not pay

proper attention to human consciousness. Maxwell worried that ignorance of this issue was misleading Victorian scientists into dangerous waters, and intended the pointsman to show them a way out.

The lesson of the pointsman was that consciousness matters, and that the physical world cannot be properly explained without considering how our role as conscious, willful beings might impact it. For the real men of the Victorian railway, this was a matter of life and death. For Maxwell, the stakes were even higher: the existence of the soul and the progress of science.

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A Conversation about Morals and History

George Cotkin

In Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670), Monsieur Jourdain is stunned to learn that "For more than forty years," he has "been talking prose without any idea of it."¹ Perhaps, as some of the commentators suggest, historians have been speaking morals for a lot longer than I had imagined. If we want to trace expressions of historians' moral language back to the Ancients or to the Enlightenment, then fine. But such a view overlooks the power and sweep of professionalized history as practiced in at least the last one hundred years.

James Livingston discovers "paradox, irony, and tragedy" aplenty in the pages of tabloids detailing the lives of Britney Spears and O. J. Simpson. If so, then he is a far more penetrating—or fantastical—reader of such publications than I am. I am also told that I need to awaken from a Rip Van Winkle slumber that has caused me to miss the moral passion in labor, women's, and black history over the last thirty years.² I was originally trained in labor history and approached the subject with passion and conviction. But passion is not akin to moral analysis and interrogation of complex issues. I invoke once again our hapless friend M. Jourdain. Informed by one of his teachers, the Philosophy Master, that moral philosophy is about how to moderate our passions, Jourdain immediately loses interest.

¹ Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin), *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (New York: Modern Library, 1957), 346.

² George Cotkin, "History's Moral Turn," *JHI* 69 (2002): 293–315. James Livingston, "The Return of the Self-Made Man: Response to Cotkin," *ibid.*, 331, 327.

He replies: "No none of that. I have a devilish excitable nature. . . . When I want to get mad, I want to get mad."³ Moral history, as I perceive it, can begin in anger. But as good history it becomes a journey into the labyrinth of uncertainty; it is more about the questions we ask, than about the conclusions that we derive.

Neil Jumonville hits the nail on the head when he notes that the practice of moral history may be a "slipperier and more pervasive category than we might think." Is it, he inquires, attention to moral topics, a "moral attitude" for the historian, a study in choices made or not made, or "a moral judgment" undertaken by the historian?⁴ Lewis Perry, following John Higham, wonders if moral history might be constituted in two ways: a recreation of "the moral tone of a particular time and place" and the choices and acts undertaken by particular individuals. Moral history, as I perceive it, necessarily resides in a capacious mansion, capable of doing the work that Perry suggests, and perhaps more.⁵

"History's Moral Turn" sought to suggest that historians might profit from explicit analysis of moral issues and to hint at how a "happy marriage" might be arranged between history and philosophy.⁶ I proposed that historians embrace concepts such as moral luck, judgment, character, and virtue, to name a few. My call for the marriage between history and philosophy was based upon a presumption that we can learn from philosophy. I fully agree with Lew Perry and Michael O'Brien that philosophers have much to learn from historians. All too often, as I mentioned in the case of A. C. Grayling, philosophers impose rigid moral categories onto complex historical situations and agents.⁷ Historical narrative, with its in-depth study of situations and agents, seems particularly well suited for moral investigation.

Historians have traditionally and wisely been alert to insights coming from other fields. Philosophy at present is undergoing major reinvigoration thanks in part to what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls, "experiments in ethics."⁸ Work in experimental psychology, evolutionary science, and neuro-

³ *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, 346

⁴ Neil Jumonville, "The Complexity of Moral History: Response to Cotkin," *JHI* 69 (2008): 319.

⁵ Lewis Perry, "Turn, Turn, Turn: Response to Cotkin," *JHI* 69 (2008): 336–37.

⁶ Cotkin, "History's Moral Turn," 295.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁸ Appiah, *Experiments in Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008). Useful for raising all sorts of questions about moral givens, is Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

science is helping philosophers to rethink various problems, especially on issues such as character and intuition. I am extremely impressed with the recent work by historian Daniel Lord Smail. He seeks to employ the findings of neuroscience to the Paleolithic period of human history. But I find him even more suggestive when he writes about how ingestion of various chemicals (coffee, tobacco, opium) affected politics and culture in eighteenth-century Europe.⁹ He walks with Antonio Damasio in breaking down strict divisions between mind and body, and in the process opens up new avenues of historical research and forces us to examine moral categories more fully.¹⁰ History is particularly well-suited for using concepts borrowed from other disciplines and applying them with equal doses of excitement and wariness.

The thorniest issue with moral history is that of the historian sitting in judgment upon the past. And here, I must admit, that I am of two minds. Certainly, as Livingston and O'Brien contend, historical interpretation and framing partake of at least implicit moral judgments. O'Brien may be correct, along with Richard Evans, in positing that historians when they make judgments tend to do so in a "ham fisted" manner.¹¹ Being judgmental, especially when the stakes are uncertain at best, is a problem. Judgment can easily swing into moralism, the emptiness of the "I could have told you so" or you should have followed certain rules and procedures. Judgments are, after all, judgmental. Moral rules can serve as rough guides but fail as explicit commands unless tempered "with subtlety, balance, and moderation," as Jumonville nicely points out.¹²

Some philosophers argue that without blaming or rendering judgments, we may surrender the very basis of moral thinking. If historians cannot help judging, then we should be aware constantly of what we are doing, of the logic and emotion lurking behind such judgments.¹³ And we

⁹ Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 179–89.

¹⁰ Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1994); *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1999); *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 2003).

¹¹ O'Brien, "Amoralities Not for Turning: Response to Cotkin," *JHI* 69 (2008): 325.

¹² Jumonville, "Response to Cotkin," 321.

¹³ For a strong statement on the centrality of blame to philosophy, see George Sher, *In Praise of Blame* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 93–122. Also, in a lower key, P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 59–80. For a take on how morality depends upon blaming, but with a different conclusion than that of Sher and Strawson, see Bernard Williams,

must embrace the complexity of competing standpoints. As historians turn to some of the recent horrors of the world, such as what happened in Rwanda, they may offer the type of distance that eluded many reporters. Historians may well find that both sides were engaged in a struggle without readily identifiable victims and killers. But if the historian finds, for example, that one side was responsible for taking the step into genocide or politicide, then that side must be named, and in so doing, the historian renders judgment.

While judging exists as part of the enterprise of moral history, it need not be its essential feature. Moral history is more about morality as process, a manner of thinking, writing, and examining of choices. This approach hints, as Perry and Jumonville note, to the works of Reinhold Niebuhr, consensus historians, and New York intellectuals. The problematic nature of action in the world is also at the center of my last book, *Existential America*.¹⁴ The problem with irony, contradiction, paradox, and complexity, in certain historical situations and moments, is that they can impede moral action, instill Hamlet-like hesitancy. Moreover, especially in the case of the New York intellectuals after the Second World War, such qualities of mind can be applied only to others, rather than serving as modes of interrogating one's own self.

Contrast three recent and, each in its own manner, exemplary works of moral history. Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering* strips the Civil War down to its essential ritual of destruction: the killing and maiming of bodies.¹⁵ While the war was a just conflict, on the part of the north, the justness of that war can impede our understanding of its harsh realities. A question arises as to whether Faust slights the moral necessity of the war in favor of the moral evil attendant with any war.¹⁶ Harry S. Stout's *Upon the Altar of the Nation* is attuned to both the political and human costs of warfare.¹⁷ He employs the valuable concept of Just War—focusing on how civilian lives are to be spared, that damage to civilians must be unintentional and not disproportionate to the military objectives to be ob-

Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 174–96.

¹⁴ George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

¹⁶ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*. For the question of the politics of war, see the review by Eric Foner, http://www.thenation.com/directory/bios/eric_foner.

¹⁷ Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the American Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006).

tained—to condemn the means by which the war was waged, especially on the part of the Union army. This is a useful critique. Michael Bess contends, in his book *Choices Under Fire*, that concepts such as Just War, however admirable, may be challenged by other concepts and realities in the practice of total warfare.¹⁸ Thus, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, human tragedies though they be, can also be understood in terms of a moral utilitarianism. Here the stress is on how choices were understood within the context of total warfare that made the dropping of these bombs appear to be moral, albeit in a tragic sense.¹⁹ Which of these conclusions, all partaking of history's moral turn, work best is an open question, one that needs to be debated not only in historical but in philosophical terms.

I admit that my embrace of a tragic and ironic moral stance is anchored in the present historical moment. My essay was written under the shadow of the Bush administration, where moral strictures and emotions trumped irony, paradox, complexity, and tragedy. Here is where my embrace of “cool compassion” was intended as an elixir of sorts. Maybe Michael O'Brien is correct in admonishing me that “vituperation and endless debates” are, as he nicely puts it, the “white noise of a functioning democracy.”²⁰ But hovering around that white noise, as Don DeLillo's novel suggests, is a toxic cloud. Vituperation becomes the end as well as the means, and it prevents us from fully appreciating and finding common ground with other points of view. In our body politics and our history, then, we would be well served by toning down the certitude behind our moral assumptions, allowing us to discuss more fully and reasonably important issues.

Historians can be moral agents. This occurs variously: by the way they frame questions, by the narratives they develop, by the questions they ask, and by their passion. By their complicating of issues and setting those issues within a framework of philosophical erudition tied to historical analysis, they can help the moral conversation to inch forward. The strong and insightful comments from Lewis Perry, Neil Jumonville, Michael O'Brien, and James Livingston lead me to believe that this has occurred in the pages of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Like all such conversation, especially about morals, there is no conclusion.

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¹⁸ Michael Bess, *Choices Under Fire: Moral Dimensions of World War II* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

¹⁹ Bess, *Choices Under Fire*, 91–110; 249–53.

²⁰ O'Brien, “Response to Cotkin,” 324.



Joseph M. Levine
1933–2008

Joseph M. Levine, Distinguished Professor of History at Syracuse University, died after several months of ill health, working on his most recent project. Educated at Cornell, Joe received his M.A. and Ph.D. at Columbia University. He taught at Queens College of the City University of New York, Columbia University, Rutgers University, University of Pennsylvania, and finally Syracuse University, where he rose to full and then distinguished professor and chair (1995–97). In the early 1960s he took time out to form the “Ellis Island Committee” whose purpose was to found a new university, which gathered considerable support, including that of Eleanor Roosevelt, before the U. S. Government withdrew its backing. On the committee were a number of younger scholars, including Joe’s wife-to-be Dee Dee, Leonard Leeb, and myself.

Joe began his graduate training in Garrett Mattingly’s seminar at the Columbia University Department of History, in 1955, beginning with a study of English historiography “from Caxton to Camden.” Among his colleagues were Stuart Prall, Martin Pine, Leonard Leeb, Richard Goldthwaite, and myself. Changing his plans to write a general survey of humanism and history in England, Joe turned to early modern antiquarianism and specifically to the great theme of Ancients and Moderns in early modern culture. He spent much time in England, especially at the British Museum and the British Library, where he had an almost unique access to the stacks. He spent time with many friends and colleagues there, including Charles Schmitt, Constance Blackwell, Quentin Skinner, and myself. He had already begun collecting his magnificent library specializing in early modern Europe.

Joe Levine’s first published book concerned “Dr. Woodward’s shield” and the complex relations of history, science, and satire in early modern

England. In his many articles and books he also ranged widely in other areas of scholarship, from Lorenzo Valla and Erasmus to Giambattista Vico, Edward Gibbon, and R. G. Collingwood, and pursuing many questions about the humanities and modern historical thought. He won both the Gershoy and the Gottschalk Prizes for his books and received many awards from several institutions, including the Institute for Advanced Study, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the National Humanities Center, and the British Library Center for the History of the Book.

In 1991 Joe received the Selma V. Forkosch Prize of the *Journal of the History of Ideas* for his article, "Giambattista Vico and the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns" (*JHI*, volume 52, issue number 1), and in 1992 he joined the editorial board of the same journal and later became its president, serving with distinction until his recent retirement, again along with Leeb, Blackwell, Skinner, Felix Gilbert, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Anthony Grafton, Edward Mahoney, Eugene Rice, John Yolton, J. B. Schneewind, Perez Zagorin, and other colleagues and mentors. On a more personal note Joe and I were continuously friends, correspondents, and collaborators for over half a century, and I cannot begin to suggest the richness of his life and achievements, or how much he will be missed.

Donald R. Kelley, Rutgers University.

BOOKS RECEIVED

- Adamson, Peter, ed. *Classical Arabic Philosophy: Sources and Reception*. London: Warburg Institute and Savigliano: N. Aragno, 2007. ix, 212p., index, £36. Eleven essays on God, self, and ontology in Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and Avicennan traditions, ninth to twelfth century.
- Ajmar-Wollheim, Marta, Flora Dennis, and Ann Matchette, eds. *Approaching the Italian Renaissance Interior: Sources, Methodologies, Debates*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2007. ix, 134p., ill., index, \$34.95. Seven essays on the domestic sphere and the organization of space in churches.
- Alexander, Jennifer Karns. *The Mantra of Efficiency: From Waterwheel to Social Control*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008. xvii, 233p., bibl., ill., index, \$49.95. Not a "culture of improvement" but domination through surveillance, manipulation, and technique.
- Allen, Thomas M. *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2008. xiii, 275p., bibl., ill., index, \$22.95. Clocks, deep time, and the *Course of Empire* from Emma Willard to Ralph Waldo Emerson.
- Amigoni, David. *Colonies, Cults and Evolution: Literature, Science and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Writing*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2008. xi, 237p., bibl., index, \$95. The modernization of the concept of culture in Coleridge, Darwin, Samuel Butler, and Edmund Gosse.
- Badcock, Sarah. *Politics and the People in Revolutionary Russia*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. xvii, 260p., bibl., index, \$99. The Volga provinces of Nizhegorod and Kazan, February to October 1917.
- Beaumont, Matthew, ed. *Adventures in Realism*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007. xix, 280p., ill., index, \$89.95. Fifteen essays on the representation of reality in nineteenth and twentieth-century art, novels, socialism, and psychoanalysis.
- Bembo, Pietro. *History of Venice*. Vol. 1. Books I–IV. Ed. and trans. Robert W. Ulery, Jr. I Tatti Renaissance Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007. xxiii, 357p., bibl., index, 29.95. First of three volumes by cardinal, papal secretary and Ciceronian Latinist in facing-page translation covering 1487–1513.
- Blake, Casey Nelson, ed. *The Arts of Democracy: Art, Public Culture, and the State*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007. xiii, 361p., ill., index, \$49.95. Twelve essays on propaganda, resistance, and activism in visual art and jazz from Norman Rockwell to the National Endowment for the Arts.
- Blustein, Jeffrey. *The Moral Demands of Memory*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2008. xii, 372p., bibl., index, \$24.99. Bioethicist argues the importance of remembering the dead, impuning historical actors with guilt, both individual and collective, and taking responsibility for one's own past.

- Bolzano, Bernard. *Gesamtausgabe*. Reihe III, Band 4, *Briefwechsel mit Johann Baptist Stoppani, Gregor Zeithammer und Johann Peter Romang 1832–1848*. Ed. Jan Berg. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2007. 189p., bibl., index, €248. Critical edition of manuscript letters on the theory of science, the perfectibility of Catholicism, mathematics, and other philosophical topics.
- Bracken, Christopher. *Magical Criticism: The Recourse of Savage Philosophy*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. ix, 266p., bibl., index, \$20. The notion that discourse can produce direct physical effects, although rejected in “the Enlightenment” as animism, persists in nineteenth- and twentieth-century social theory.
- Brogan, Hugh. *Alexis de Tocqueville: A Life*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2006. x, 724p., bibl., ill., index, \$20. Comprehensive biography.
- Brokaw, Cynthia J. *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007. xxiii, 673p., bibl., ill., index, \$44.95. The printing, sales, and circulation of educational textbooks, household guides, medical handbooks, and fortune-telling manuals in rural southeastern China, late seventeenth to early twentieth century.
- Brophy, James M. *Popular Culture and the Public Sphere in the Rhineland 1800–1850*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. xvi, 365p., bibl., ill., index, \$99. Practices of political participation through reading, singing, carnival, and religion.
- Brown, Frederick. *Flaubert: A Biography*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007. 628p., bibl., ill., index, \$18.95. Family, famous friendships, and liaisons joined with French politics and society, 1848–1871, in addition to the composition of *Madame Bovary* and other writings.
- Bruni, Leonardo. *History of the Florentine People*. Vol. 3. Books IX–XII. And *Memoirs*. Ed. and trans. James Hankins with D. J. W. Bradley. I Tatti Renaissance Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007. xxi, 477p., indices, \$29.95. Final volume covering 1378–1402 in facing-page translation, plus Bruni’s autobiographical *Memoirs*.
- Brzyski, Anna, ed. *Partisan Canons*. Durham, N. C.: Duke UP, 2007. 370p., bibl., ill., index, \$24.95. Fourteen essays historicize the aesthetic, market, political factors, and role of individual critics that establish and alter the list of canonical works in art history.
- Budgen, Sebastian, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek, eds. *Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth*. Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 2007. viii, 337p., index, \$23.95. Seventeen “Lacanian interventions” retool Lenin to resist global capitalism and liberal-democratic politics, just as Lenin retooled Marx after 1914.
- Burke, Peter, and R. Po-chia Hsia, eds. *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. ix, 252p., bibl., index, \$95. Twelve essays on the exchange of European values and knowledge in sci-

- tific, political and religious texts translated into Latin, Greek, Spanish, Chinese, Turkish, and Russian.
- Burland, Margaret Jewett. *Strange Words: Retelling and Reception in the Medieval Roland Textual Tradition*. Notre Dame, Ind.: U of Notre Dame P, 2007. x, 332p., bibl., index, \$37. Readings of four *Chanson de Roland* texts in French and Occitan as commentaries on contemporary issues.
- Carhart, Michael C. *The Science of Culture in Enlightenment Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007), xii, 360p., ill., index, \$49.95. Models of human social development reconstructed using anthropology, classical philology, and Old Testament criticism during the age of revolutions.
- Carrier, Martin, Don Howard, and Janet Kourany, eds. *The Challenge of the Social and the Pressure of Practice: Science and Values Revisited*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2008. vii, 262p., index, \$50. Eleven essays refute the myth of objectivity in science by exploring practice, expertise, socially robust knowledge, and research funding.
- Castoriadis, Cornelius. *Figures of the Unthinkable*. Trans. Helen Arnold. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 2007. xii, 279p., \$24.95. Writings by the late Greek psychoanalyst and economist applying the core worldview of Athens to modern democracy, capitalism, individual autonomy, and the politics of hate.
- Chaplin, Tamara. *Turning on the Mind: French Philosophers on Television*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. xvi, 334p., bibl., ill., index, \$24. The abstract made visible as the nation reconstructs a postwar identity confronting Vichy, collaboration, decolonization, racism, women, and AIDS through mass education and mass morality.
- Chartier, Roger. *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007. xiii, 203p., index, \$55. The authorial quest for permanence and fear of obliteration, expressed in the comic theater of Cervantes, Ben Jonson, Cyrano, Carlo Goldoni, and Diderot.
- Chin, Catherine M. *Grammar and Christianity in the Late Roman World*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2008. 272p., bibl., index. The construction of *Christianitas* and of pre-Christian Classical culture through the religious and literary ideology embedded in Latin usage textbooks, AD 350–500.
- Ciceronian Controversies*. Ed. Joann Dellaneva, trans. Brian Duvick. xxix, 295p., bibl., index, \$29.95. Facing-page translation of exchanges between Poliziano—Curtesi, Pico—Bembi, and Ginzio—Calcagnini—Lilio over Neo-Latin style.
- Clark, Anna J. *Divine Qualities: Cult and Community in Republican Rome*. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. xiv, 376p., bibl., index. Invocations of cults of *fides*, *salus*, *concordia*, *libertas* in dramatic stage appearances, capitol and forum monuments, and the Roman civil vocabulary.
- Cook, Harold J. *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007. xiv, 562p., bibl., ill.,

index, \$35. The scientific revolution as part of a need for precise information in colonial trade, natural history, and medicine.

Cormack, Bradin. *A Power to Do Justice: Jurisdiction, English Literature, and the Rise of Common Law, 1509–1625*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. xv, 406p., ill., index, \$35. John Skelton, Thomas More, Edmund Spenser, and Shakespeare.

Corthell, Ronald et al., eds. *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*. Notre Dame, Ind.: U of Notre Dame P, 2007. vi, 324p., ill., index. Eleven essays by literature critics contest the Protestant Whig narrative of plots, rebellion, war, and Jacobitism.

Craig, David M. *Robert Southey and Romantic Apostasy: Political Argument in Britain 1780–1840*. Rochester, N.Y.: Royal Historical Society, 2007. xiv, 236p., bibl., index, \$85. The poet laureate disavows his youthful Jacobinism.

Dacey, Austin. *The Secular Conscience: Why Belief Belongs in Public Life*. Amherst, N. Y.: Prometheus, 2008. 269p., index, \$24.95. How secularism lost its soul and ceded the public sphere to religionists.

Daston, Lorraine, and Peter Galison. *Objectivity*. New York: Zone, 2007. 501p., ill., index, \$38.95. Scientific atlases, mid-eighteenth to early twentieth century, train the eye to see what is important in an object (and in a discipline), and a shift from the ideal archetype to the complexity of individual specimens with the advent of photography.

DeGroot, Gerard J. *The Sixties Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Disorderly Decade*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007. xi, 508p., bibl., index, \$29.95. Anti-nostalgic global examination of futile idealism in the face of military atrocities, chauvinism, and greed.

Eisenmenger, Johann Andreas. *The Traditions of the Jews*. Trans. J. P. Stehelin. Coeur d'Alene, Idaho: Independent History & Research, 2006. 872p., bibl., ill. Facsimile reprint of two-volume abridged translation (1742–48) of suppressed *Entdecktes Judenthum* (1700), reprinted approvingly as exposing doctrinal demagoguery of rabbinic Judaism and a contribution to the canon of contemporary anti-Semitism.

Evergates, Theodore. *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne, 1100–1300*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007. vi, 415p., bibl., index, \$95.95. Fief holding, the conjugal family, and the rise of the comital state transformation of a loose assortment of baronial and knightly families into a self-conscious aristocracy with a shared identity.

Finkel, Stuart. *On the Ideological Front: The Russian Intelligentsia and the Making of the Soviet Public Sphere*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007. viii, 358p., index, \$55. The 1922 purge of a hundred foes of Bolshevism and the imposition of ideological conformity.

Folengo, Teofilo. *Baldo*. Vol. 1. Books I–XII. Trans. Ann E. Mullaney. I Tatti Renaissance Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007. xii, 471p., bibl., index, \$29.95. Pre-Rabelaisian naughty humor in English translation facing macaronic Italo-Latin original.

- Formisano, Ronald P. *For the People: American Populist Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2008. The theory of rule by the people and the reality of rule by elected representatives.
- Francis, Mark. *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007. xiv, 434p., bibl., ill., index. Rejecting Social Darwinism, emphasizing instead personality and complexity of thought in Spencer's attempt to systematize biological, psychological, and sociological forms.
- Friedel, Robert. *A Culture of Improvement: Technology and the Western Millennium*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT P, 2007. x, 588p., ill., index, \$39.95. Innovation and invention in plows, mills, communication, and transportation from eleventh to twenty-first century shows a deeply rooted belief that things could be done in a better way.
- Fyfe, Aileen, and Bernard Lightman. *Science in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. x, 410p., bibl., ill., index, \$45. Twelve essays on Victorian edutainment.
- Georgopoulou, Maria et al., eds. *Following Pausanias: The Quest for Greek Antiquity*. Athens: Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies, and Oak Knoll P, 2007. 251p., bibl., many ill., index. The Periegesis in the second century AD, its reception in the medieval and early modern periods, featuring books, maps, antiquities, and other reconstructions of the ancient traveler's world.
- Gkotzaridis, Evi. *Trials of Irish History: Genesis and Evolution of a Reappraisal 1938–2000*. New York: Routledge, 2006. xi, 324p., bibl., index. The historiography of Ireland historicized as a battle between nationalist propaganda and revisionism.
- Golinski, Jan. *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. xv, 284p., bibl., ill., index, \$35. Practices and meanings of observation, instruments, forecasting, and health at home and in the colonies.
- Gruder, Vivian R. *The Notables and the Nation: The Political Schooling of the French 1787–1788*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007. x, 495p., ill., index, \$59.95. Public opposition to the monarchy and nobility as expressed and read in popular media—newspapers, newsletters, pamphlets, literary societies, songs, iconography, and community assemblies.
- Guyatt, Nicholas. *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607–1876*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. ix, 341p., index, \$24.99. Separatism, manifest destiny, and national purpose formulated in the colonial period and challenged by race and slavery.
- Hahn, Songsuk Susan. *Contradiction in Motion: Hegel's Organic Concept of Life and Value*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007. xv, 220p., bibl., index, \$49.95. Holism in generation and development of biological life, plus organic unity in aesthetics, ethics, and conceiving of the self.
- Hamann, Johann Georg. *Writings on Philosophy and Language*. Trans. and ed. Kenneth Haynes. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. xxxv, 252p., bibl., in-

- dices, \$24.99. Twelve essays (1759–84) on linguistic particularism against the purity of universal reason, richly annotated by the editor.
- Hankins, James, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. xvi, 450p., bibl., index. Eighteen essays address continuities with Greek and Arabic traditions plus innovations in theology, ethics, cosmology, and politics that point toward modern philosophy.
- Haraway, Donna J. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008. x, 423p., ill., index, \$24.95. Trainable animals as “companion species” and “natureculture” “compounds.”
- Harrison, Peter. *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. xi, 300p., bibl., index, \$95. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scientific knowledge springing from theology.
- Hawley, Joshua David. *Theodore Roosevelt: Preacher of Righteousness*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2008. xviii, 318p., index, \$35. “Warrior republicanism” in the Progressive era.
- Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation*. New York: Zone, 2007. 386p., bibl., index, \$33. Comparative literature approach to the common sense of being aware of one’s own self in Aristotle, Islamic and medieval philosophy, early modern science, and modern psychology.
- Helmont, Franciscus Mercurius van. *The Alphabet of Nature*. Trans. Allison P. Coudert and Taylor Corse. Leiden: Brill, 2007. xlvii, 213p., bibl., ill., index, \$179. Facing-page Latin-English translation of *A Short Sketch of the Truly Natural Hebrew Alphabet* (1667), exploring the shapes and sounds of words and letters in the tradition of Neoplatonism and Kabbalah.
- Hessler, John W. *The Naming of America: Martin Waldseemüller’s 1507 World Map and the Cosmographiae Introductio*. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2008. 128p., bibl., many ill., \$24.95. Sheet-by-sheet color facsimile of map depicting Vespucci’s new world separated from Asia by a Pacific Ocean.
- Horkheimer, Max. *A Life in Letters: Selected Correspondence*. Ed. and trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2007. 435p., bibl., index, \$55. 1918–73 showing the reception of Marx, Freud, Thomas Mann, Adorno, Marcuse and later the transformative power of education.
- Hughes, Derek. *Culture and Sacrifice: Ritual Death in Literature and Opera*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. xi, 313p., bibl., ill., index, \$85. The West’s fear of its own barbarism from Greece to the discovery of the Aztecs to D. H. Lawrence and Stravinsky.
- Hull, David L., and Michael Ruse. *Cambridge Companion to the Philosophy of Biology*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. xvii, 513p., bibl., ill., index, \$34.99. Twenty-three essays on evolution, selection, genetics, development, teleology, and function in the life sciences.

- Jayne, Allen. *Lincoln and the American Manifesto*. Amherst, N. Y.: Prometheus, 2007. 392p., bibl., index, \$28. Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence and rational Deistic religion as a call for universal equality and human rights.
- Kaiser, Wolfram. *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. xii, 374p., bibl., index, \$105. Long-term (relatively) perspective on European integration from nineteenth-century political Catholicism to inter- and postwar cross-border party networking.
- Kaplan, Catherine O'Donnell. *Men of Letters in the Early Republic*. Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute, 2008. ix, 239p., index, \$24.95. Periodical literature of Elihu Hubbard Smith, Joseph Dennie, Joseph Stevens Buckminster, Arthur Maynard Walter, and William Smith Shaw.
- Knox, MacGregor. *To the Threshold of Power, 1922/33: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and Nationalist Dictatorships, Vol. 1*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. xvi, 448p., bibl., index, \$22.99. Nineteenth-century nationalism, mass politics, and postwar civil struggle.
- Krishnan, Sanjay. *Reading the Global: Troubling Perspectives on Britain's Empire in Asia*. New York: Columbia UP, 2007. ix, 242p., bibl., index, \$39.50. Representations of the Malay archipelago as a single interconnected world by Adam Smith, Thomas de Quincey, Abdullah Munski, and Joseph Conrad.
- Kuklick, Henrika, ed. *A New History of Anthropology*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2008. xii, 402p., bibl., ill., index, \$39.95. Nineteen essays on major traditions, neglected pasts, abandoned obsessions, as well as the biology of race.
- Largier, Niklaus. *In Praise of the Whip: A Cultural History of Arousal*. Trans. Graham Harman. New York: Zone, 2007. 562p., bibl., ill., index, \$37. Monastic asceticism, repressed in Protestant and Catholic Reformations, redirected as modern sexual fantasy.
- Lightman, Bernard. *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. xvi, 545p., bibl., ill., index, \$45. Journalists and dramatic lecturers digest the larger meanings of evolution and other theories.
- Liu, Catherine et al., eds. *The Dreams of Interpretation: A Century Down the Royal Road*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007. xxv, 379p., index, \$25. Twenty-three essays on Freud and Freudianism from film studies, comparative literature, and practicing psychoanalysts.
- Lloyd, Howell A., Glenn Burgess, and Simon Hodson, eds. *European Political Thought 1450–1700: Religion, Law and Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007. xiv, 658p., bibl., ill., index, \$85. Fourteen essays address the kingdoms from Portugal to Muscovy.
- Machamer, Peter, and Gereon Wolters, eds. *Thinking About Causes: From Greek Philosophy to Modern Physics*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2007. viii, 318p., index, \$75. Sixteen essays by philosophers from 2005 Pittsburgh-Konstanz conference.

- Magill, R. Jay, Jr. *Chic Ironic Bitterness*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2007. xix, 273p., bibl., ill., index, \$29.95. Socrates with a GameBoy and early twenty-first-century American popular satire ;-)
- Mazella, David. *The Making of Modern Cynicism*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2007. xi, 305p., bibl., index, \$35. Study in semantics shows an inversion from the philosopher's public life as the proving ground of philosophical truth to a fraudulent, fashionable, disbelieving conformism.
- Mazzotti, Massimo. *The World of Maria Gaetana Agnesi, Mathematician of God*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2007. xx, 217p., bibl., ill., index, \$49.95. Communities of scholarship and devotionism in the "Catholic Enlightenment."
- McIntosh-Varjabédian, and Véronique Gély, eds. *La postérité de la renaissance*. Lille: U Charles-de-Gaulle—Lille 3, 2007. 316p., €18,50. Twenty-three essays explore perceptions of the Renaissance—Italian and Northern, Latin and vernacular—in nineteenth-century history, the arts, literature, and philosophy.
- Meserve, Margaret. *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2008. viii, 359p., ill., index, \$49.95. Critical inquiry meets religious prejudice in fifteenth-century appraisals of Turkish origins and statecraft.
- Miskolcze, Robin. *Women and Children First: Nineteenth-Century Sea Narratives and American Identity*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2007. xxii, 220p., bibl., ill., index, \$45. Sinking ships and gender in antebellum America.
- Molho, Anthony, and Diogo Ramada Curto, eds. *Finding Europe: Discourses on Margins, Communities, Images*. New York: Berghahn, 2007. x, 407p., ill., index, \$89.95. Fifteen essays on narratives of European teleological progress, the post-Enlightenment emergence of the concept of "Europe," and its redefinitions in the past two centuries.
- Morson, Gary Saul. "Anna Karenina" in *Our Time: Seeing More Wisely*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007. xx, 263p., index, \$35. Tolstoy as a radical challenger of romantic love, social reform, and modernization, finding evil in sins of omission, virtue in everyday kindness.
- Müller-Wille, Staffan, and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, eds. *Heredity Produced: At the Crossroads of Biology, Politics, and Culture, 1500–1870*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 2007. x, 496p., ill., index, \$50. Nineteen essays explore the transition from generation as holistic development, involving conception, pregnancy, maternal, and astral influences usually discussed in law and politics, reduced in mid-nineteenth-century to biological transmission of material traits and characteristics.
- Muir, Edward. *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance: Skeptics, Libertines, and Opera*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007. xiii, 175p., index, \$24.95. The expulsion of the Jesuits from Venice 1591–1640s and a partial lifting of religious censorship encourages freedom of inquiry and sparks a revolt against church and aristocracy that was debated in pamphlets, clandestine manuscripts, and opera libretti.

- Nummedal, Tara. *Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. xvii, 260p., bibl., ill., index, \$37.50. Practical techniques of metallurgy, mining, and medicine as everyday entrepreneurial alchemists defend themselves against accusations of fraud.
- O'Connor, Ralph. *The Earth on Show: Fossils and the Poetics of Popular Science, 1802–1856*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. xiii, 541p., bibl., ill., index, \$45. How a new geohistory, more alluring than the standard six days of Creation, was assembled and sold to a Bible-reading public.
- Owen, Richard. *On the Nature of Limbs: A Discourse*. Ed. Ron Amundson. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007. cii, 119p., ill., \$20. Facsimile reprint of 1849 treatise on evolutionary developmental biology.
- Painter, Karen. *Symphonic Aspirations: German Music and Politics, 1900–1945*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007. vii, 354p., index, \$49.95. Nationalism, liberalism, socialism, and anti-Semitism in the reception of Mahler and Bruckner.
- Pearce, Susan, ed. *Visions of Antiquity: The Society of Antiquities of London, 1707–2007*. London: Society of Antiquities, 2007. xi, 451p., many ill., index, \$150. Sixteen richly-illustrated essays based on archival research describe three centuries of antiquarian collecting and scholarship.
- Pius II, Pope. *Commentaries*. Vol. 2. Books III–IV. Ed. Margaret Meserve and Marcello Simonetta. I Tatti Renaissance Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007. 407p., index, \$29.95. 1937 translation facing a new edition in Ciceronian Latin of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini's autobiography.
- Platania, Marco. *Montesquieu e la virtù: Rappresentazioni della Francia di Ancien Régime e dei governi repubblicani*. Turin: UTET, 2007. xxi, 265p., bibl., index, €18. The economic, social, and political transformations of the Old Regime and its ongoing confrontation with antiquity.
- Quirk, Tom. *Mark Twain and Human Nature*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2007. xvi, 289p., index, \$39.95. Psychological biography documents the humorist's changing insights regarding real and fictitious characters.
- Reinhold, Karl Leonhard. *Korrespondenz*. Band 2, 1788–1790. Ed. Faustino Fabbianelli et al. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2007. xxi, 372p., indices, €325. 236 letters place the philosopher in touch with leading thinkers of the Kantian era—Fülleborn, Garve, Irwing, Jacobi, Justi, Nicolai, and especially Wieland.
- Rivière, Peter. *A History of Oxford Anthropology*. New York: Berghahn, 2007. xv, 214p., bibl., ill., index, \$59.95. Eight essays on the Pitt-Rivers Museum and the study of tribal societies by E. B. Tylor, Balfour, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Prichard, and others.
- Rütten, Thomas. *Geschichten vom Hippokratischen Eid*. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz and Herzog August Bibliothek, 2008. CD-ROM, €20. Hippocratic oaths, texts, interpretations and representations in art and music from antiquity to the contemporary world.
- Scott, Hamish, and Brendan Simmons, ed. *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. xv, 382p.,

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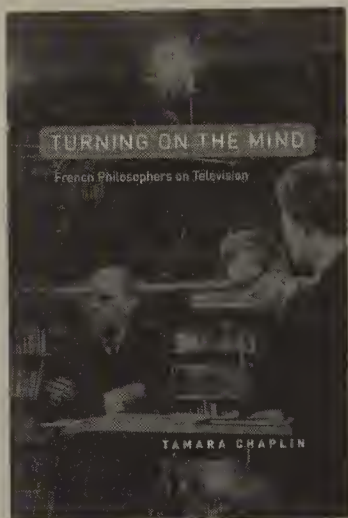
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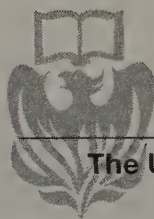
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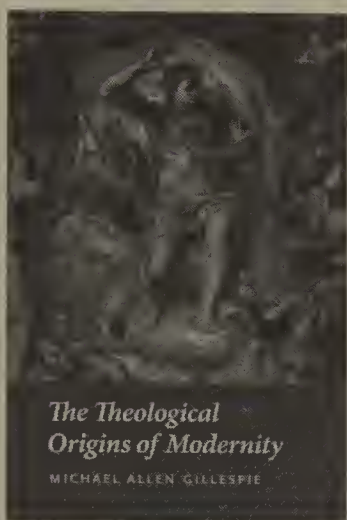
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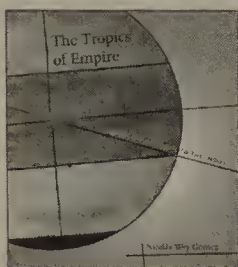
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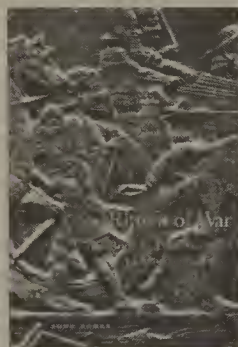
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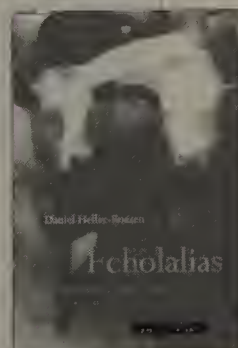
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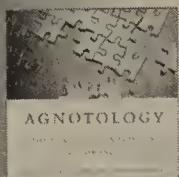
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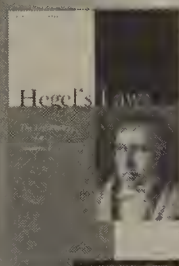


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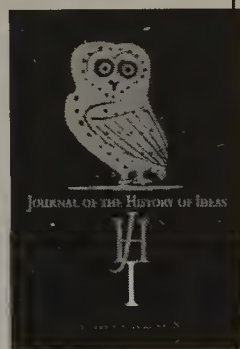
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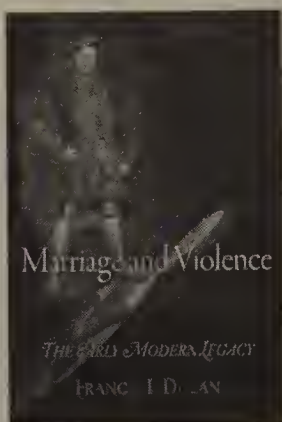
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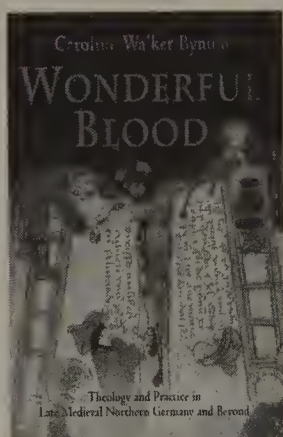
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Protestant Theology and Apocalyptic Rhetoric in Roger Ascham's The Schoolmaster

Ryan J. Stark

Samuel Johnson described Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster* (1570) as "perhaps containing the best advice that was ever given for the study of languages."¹ Not prone to hyperbole, Johnson recognized in Ascham the same excellence that Elizabeth did. Upon taking the throne, she invited Ascham to become her informal tutor, and he agreed, having already instructed the teenage Elizabeth in rhetoric and grammar. Ascham also gained fame in England as the author of *Toxophilus, or the School or Partitions of Shooting* (1545), on the surface a book about archery, but at bottom an argument about English eloquence and the Protestant Reformation. The text is a thinly veiled allegory favoring reform and promoting vernacular rhetoric as a weapon in that cause, for the "utter destruction of papistrie and heresie."² *Toxophilus* furthermore sets the stage for *The Schoolmaster*, an even more ambitious critique of Catholicism, where Ascham advances "Christes trewe Religion," the Church of England, as the institutional starting point for proper rhetorical education.³

The Reformation provides the religious context for Ascham's philoso-

¹ Samuel Johnson, "Life of Ascham," in *The Works of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1825), 6: 517.

² Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus*, in *English Works*, ed. William Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), xi.

³ Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, in *English Works*, 234. On differences between this edition and the original manuscript, see George Parks, "The First Draft of Ascham's *Schoolmaster*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 1 (1938): 313–27.

phy of eloquence. And from the Reformation, he inherits some disturbing ideas, including notions of apocalypse, Catholic witchcraft, and mass demonic possession, all of which appear in the pages of *The Schoolmaster*. Ascham was a vehement Protestant, polemically and theologically minded, though Rosemary O'Day's entry on him in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* gives a very different impression. Here, Ascham comes into view as a pragmatist interested mainly in training burgeoning elites for courtly intrigue, a perception shared by John Roe, Jennifer Richards, and Frank Whigham, all of whom describe Ascham as a teacher and a practitioner of what Roe calls "Machiavellian dissimulation."⁴ But Ascham's persistent Protestant sermonizing suggests otherwise, to the point that we should re-imagine his motives for writing *The Schoolmaster*. While the practical agenda of training courtiers undoubtedly exists, it is made secondary by a deeper spiritual purpose: salvation. Ascham teaches English eloquence primarily so that Protestant students might defend themselves against the Devil's and Rome's rhetoric before the world ends, for the sake of their own salvation as well as England's. His overriding concern is profoundly theological, rather than narrowly political, making the treatise more catechistic than courtly in mood. The book is a religious argument, in other words, an attempt to advance the idiom and the cause of English Protestantism in light of an apocalyptic situation.

A broader implication follows. Scholars require a neglected theological category—eschatology—in order adequately to discuss the rise of modern English eloquence. Of course, several critics have connected rhetorical developments in sixteenth-century England to theological debates, but no one has attended to the significance of eschatology as a major aspect of these developments.⁵ This is a serious oversight. Fears of the apocalypse are pre-

⁴ Rosemary O'Day, "Roger Ascham," in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/732?docPos=2> [consulted July 6, 2008]; John Roe, "The Writings of Roger Ascham and Sir Philip Sidney," in *Renaissance Go-Betweens*, ed. Andreas Hofele and Werner Von Koppenfels (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 152; Jennifer Richards, *Rhetoric and Courtliness in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 125–30; Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 33–62.

⁵ See, for example, Brian Cummings, *Grammar and Grace: The Literary Culture of the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 235–42; Ian Robinson, *The Establishment of Modern English Prose in the Reformation and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 71–103; Debora Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric: The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

cisely what gave urgency to the formation of an effective Protestant idiom in the first place, one that worked against Catholic rhetorical influences, or Antichrist's tropes, by the standards of most Reformers. That is, an apocalyptic anxiety shaped the origins of modern English rhetoric, and Ascham's *Schoolmaster* played an important role in this event.

THE ANXIETY OF APOCALYPSE

Ascham lived in an age full of doomsday arguments. The idea of an impending apocalypse pervaded early Reformation culture, beginning with Luther's identification of Leo X as Antichrist and intensifying with Lucas Cranach and Phillip Melancthon's *Passional Christi und Antichristi* (1521). The concept carried over finally into the works of foundational English Reformers such as Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, and John Cheke. It seems clear that Ascham and others were deeply concerned about the end of days. As Bryan Ball suggests, the belief in an imminent apocalypse was "nearly universal" among English Protestants: "At no other time in England's history has the doctrine of the second advent been so widely or so readily accepted."⁶ Stuart Clark makes a similar argument: "The advent of the Antichrist [in the form of the Papacy] was taken as the surest of many signs that the English Reformation was a part of that decisive battle between good and evil as described in Revelation."⁷ In the middle of the sixteenth century, the premise that the world might end at any moment operated as an uncontroversial presupposition in most discourses. It was assumed. And while this fact alone does not establish Ascham's anxiety of apocalypse, neither should we disconnect him from the period's eschatological milieu.⁸

⁶ Brian Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1600* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 232. See also *Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents, and Repercussions*, ed. C.A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Paul Christianson, *English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

⁷ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 339.

⁸ See, for example, Melanie Ord, "Classical and Contemporary Italy in Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster*," *Renaissance Studies* 16 (2002): 202–16; Alvin Vos, "The Character of English Ciceronianism," *Studies in English Literature* 19 (1979): 3–18; Linda B. Salmon, "The Courtier and *The Schoolmaster*," *Comparative Literature* 25 (1973): 17–36; Lawrence V. Ryan, *Roger Ascham* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963); Constance Smith, "Some Ideas on Education before Locke," *JHI* 23 (1962): 403–6. On broader

A few examples of apocalyptic arguments will help to illustrate the era's pitch and pattern of anxiety. Cranmer—Ascham's forerunner and the chief architect of Henry's split from Catholicism—preaches sermons at St. Paul's Cross against "the Pope," the "true Antichrist," which he means in the most literal sense.⁹ Later, in *Catechismus* (1548), he directly warns of the world's end: "The devyll in this lattre tyme doeth dayly more and more rage against the true churche and people of God, for [. . .] he perceyveth, that hys kyngdome draweth to an ende, and a shorte tyme remayneth untill the day of judgements come, and hys everlastynge damnation."¹⁰ The idea of Satan's final rage, *postremus furor Satanae*, is commonplace in sixteenth-century English theology, but seldom is it expressed so cogently. Hugh Latimer strikes a similar apocalyptic chord in a sermon delivered before Edward VI in 1549: "The end of the world is neare at hand. For there is a lacke of fayeth now. Also the defection is come and swarving fro the faith. Antichrist the man of synne the sonne of iniquity is revealed, y^e latter dai is at hand."¹¹ Cranmer and Latimer obviously anticipated the forthcoming apocalypse, which set in motion—among other things—their efforts to establish *The Book of Common Prayer* (1549), an act of rebellion against Rome that contributed to their executions during Mary's reign. Why create a Reformed vernacular prayer book? The short answer is that they wanted to defend English Protestantism against "Antichrist[']s" religion and rhetoric. Why create a Reformed vernacular treatise on eloquence? The answer, I submit, is the same, which is to say that Ascham's *Schoolmaster* ought to be understood as one part of the larger Protestant effort to dissociate England from Rome, both in theology and philology, before the world's finale.

studies of Renaissance rhetoric that are unmindful of the period's eschatological milieu, see, for example, Cathy Shrank, *Writing the Nation in Reformation England, 1530–1580* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Heinrich Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004); Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Wayne Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men's Minds: Literature and the Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

⁹ Cranmer, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. J.S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R.H. Brodie (London: Stationer's Office, 1862–1932), 10: 104.

¹⁰ Cranmer, *Catechismus* (London: N. Hill, 1548), 202. On Cranmer's rhetoric, see Cummings, *Grammar and Grace*, 235–42; Robinson, *The Establishment of Modern English Prose*, 71–103. On the Devil's final rage—*postremus furor Satanae*—see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 321–34. The concept is derived from Revelation 12.12: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, and of the sea; for the devil is come down unto you which hath great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time" (*Geneva Bible*, 1560).

¹¹ Latimer, *Certaine Godly Sermons* (London: John Day, 1562), 59.

The tenors of these early Reformers reverberate in *The Schoolmaster*. Ascham sounds much like Cranmer and Latimer, for example, in his apocalyptic description of misrule in English education, which he blames in large part upon Catholic influences: "Innocencie is gone: Bashfulnesse is banished: moch presumption in yougthe: small authoritie in aige: Reverence is neglected: dewties be confounded: and to be shorte, disobedience doth ouerflowe the bankes of good order, almoste in everie place, almoste in everie degree of man."¹² Ascham all but announces that the Devil has broken loose in England, alluding to that same demonic "rage" and "swarving fro the faith" that Cranmer and Latimer identify a few years earlier. The caveat in their arguments is that such bedlam portends the world's doom. The degree to which Ascham anticipates catastrophe is slightly less clear, but not by much. There is also something of Cranmer's sensibility in Ascham's description of "papists" who threaten the "the Candel of Goddes worde," which is "oft put out" by those who hold "contempt" for "Gods trewe Religion."¹³ However much he echoes Cranmer's tone, Ascham certainly appropriates his strident Protestantism, and Latimer's as well, for that matter, which is the Protestantism of the age, and which is by its very nature wrought with eschatological worry.

Because of the mayhem at work in "almoste everie place" and "almoste everie degree of man"—a sweeping statement that recalls the conditions preceding the Great Flood—Ascham urgently prays: "God grafte in us the trewe knowledge of his woorde, with a forward will to folowe it, and so to bring forth the sweete fruites of it, & then shall he preserve us [i.e., English Reformers] by his Grace, from all maner of terrible dayes."¹⁴ The "terrible dayes" most probably include the day of reckoning, given that Ascham's sweeping statement echoes 2 Timothy 3:1–5.¹⁵ Even more apparent is his prayerful allusion to Romans 11:17–22, where Paul uses a gardening allegory to discuss how God provides salvation for the gentiles, grafting them onto the tree of life, while simultaneously cutting away the dead branches that bear no fruit.¹⁶ Ascham applies the metaphor to a similar end, asking

¹² Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 209.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 3.1–5, from the *Geneva Bible*: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

¹⁶ Romans 11.17–22, from the *Geneva Bible*: "And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Well; because of unbelief they were broken

God to graft onto the tree of life the English Reformers, all the while implying that Catholics have lost their way, or have become dead branches. Ascham—it seems clear—also uses these Biblical verses in tandem for an eschatological effect: Timothy's apocalyptic warning provides the historical bearing for Ascham's gardening metaphor (i.e., time is short). Moreover, and more broadly, Ascham's command of religious disputation is undeniable here, calling into serious question O'Day's argument that he "is no theologian"—that he is only marginally and reluctantly interested in religious debate.¹⁷ Evidence suggests otherwise.

Of all of the apocalyptic philosophers of the period, Cheke probably exerted the strongest influence upon Ascham, though an argument could also be made for the German philosopher Johann Sturm. But the former was Ascham's teacher, and such a connection is significant. Ascham studied under Cheke at Cambridge, where they later taught rhetoric and grammar together. And he admired Cheke, a paragon of sound religion, good judgment, and proper eloquence, which for most Christian humanists were inseparable categories. Ascham praises Cheke no fewer than five times in *The Schoolmaster*, emphasizing his "excellency in studying" and "godlynes in living."¹⁸ Such epideictic rhetoric is key to the book's polemical current, because Cheke had the reputation of a bilious Protestant, not as bilious as John Bale, but close. For example, when Englishmen confused proper religion with its "playne contrarie" (i.e., Catholicism), Cheke argued that a series of demonic inversions followed: "for right wronge, for vertue vice, for lawe will, for love hatred, for truth falshod, [. . .] for religion superstition, for true worshippe detestable idolatrie: and to be shorte, for God Sathan, for Christ Antichrist."¹⁹ This sort of rhetoric disturbed those on the wrong side of the antitheses, unsurprisingly, which is why Cheke was forced to recant his theology under the threat of death by Mary's court—an episode that depressed Cheke and disgusted Ascham. In fact, Ascham's heavy-handed approval of Cheke and passionate disapproval of "Papistrie" throughout *The Schoolmaster* should be read as a response to this infamous

off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, [take heed] lest he also spare not thee. Behold the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."

¹⁷ O'Day, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/732?docPos=2> [consulted July 6, 2008])

¹⁸ Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 219.

¹⁹ Cheke, *The Hurt of Sedicion* (1549), in *Holinshead's Chronicles*, ed. H. Ellis (London: J. Johnson, 1807), 3: 1003.

recantation, and it accomplishes two theological purposes: to endorse the philosophical precepts of ardent Protestantism and to censure Catholic factions who had hoped to tarnish Cheke's reputation, and had succeeded for a short time, until Ascham and others set the record straight.²⁰

Finally, there is John Aylmer, the renowned Protestant teacher complimented by Ascham in *The Schoolmaster*. Like Ascham, Aylmer presents Elizabethan society as the righteous antithesis of Catholic empire.²¹ He applauds English Reformers for advancing "the true doctrine of Christ's cross, which of late through the power of darkness, the members of antichrist's and Satan's guard, hath not only been obscured, but clean defaced."²² Who, then, will rescue England from the Catholic Antichrist? Aylmer's answer, and the commonplace answer, is Elizabeth—the "English Helena"—a reference to Constantine's mother.²³ But one crucial disjunction existed between Elizabeth and the mother of the first Christian emperor, as sixteenth-century theologians figured the analogy. The Protestant revival of "true" religion served an entirely different purpose: to stand against Antichrist's kingdom, working towards England's salvation before the Second Advent.

Ascham would have come into contact directly or indirectly with many other apocalyptic philosophers: Nicolas Ridley, Thomas Becon, John Foxe, and the list continues.²⁴ He lived in an era packed full of eschatological fret. There are too many writers to note, and past a certain point such noting seems unnecessary. From Ascham's perspective, and from nearly every other perspective, the epoch was marked by the spirit of doom and gloom, not by the *Zeitgeist* of a golden renaissance. It was the Age of Apocalypse, where either Catholic demonry or Protestant heresy functioned as evidence of the world's impending destruction.

APOCALYPTIC HUMANISM

Perhaps the most often quoted passage from *The Schoolmaster*—and one of the most provocative—is Ascham's harrowing description of the "En-

²⁰ Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 229.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

²² Aylmer, *A Harborowe for Faithfull and True Subjects* (London: John Day, 1559), A4r. On Aylmer, see Peter McCullough, *Sermons at Court: Politics and Religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean Preaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 67–68.

²³ Aylmer, *A Harborowe*, R3r.

²⁴ Ridley connects the papacy to Antichrist as a matter of ordinary conversation: "The false prophets of antichrist, which are past all shame, do openly preach in the pulpits unto the people of God [. . .] whereby their old blindness is brought home again" (A

glish man Italianated,” a phrase used to denote the corrupting influence of Catholic eloquence and education upon English students, especially those who travel abroad:

If some yet do not well understand, what is an English man Italianated, I will plainlie tell him. He, that by living, & traveling in *Italie*, bringeth home into England out of *Italie*, the Religion, the learning, the policie, the experience, the maners of *Italie*. That is to say, for Religion, Papistrie or worse [e.g., overt witchcraft]: for learnyng, lesse commonly, than they carried with them: for pollicie, a factious hart, a discoursing head, a mynde to medle in all mens matters: for experience, plentie of new mischievs never knowne in England before: for maners, varietie of vanities, and chaunge of filthy lyving.²⁵

“These” are the “enchantementes of Circe,” Ascham summarizes in a dramatic metaphor, “brought out of *Italie* to marre mens maners in England.”²⁶ For Ascham, the Catholic way of life threatens English education, transmogrifying students into beasts. Noticeably, too, he organizes the argument around a list of vices presented in quick succession, all the while intimating the Reformer’s positive attributes: a fit mode of worship, a sound mind, a true heart, and suitable etiquette. What Ascham provides, here, is a truncated account of the struggle between good and evil, reminiscent of Cheke’s antitheses that culminate with the crescendo “for Christ Antichrist.” But rather than a crescendo, Ascham creates a diminuendo. He begins with the vital contrast between proper religion and Papistrie, a version of the Christ-Antichrist binary, and then traces out the negative side of the contrariety through increasingly ordinary details, finally concluding with habits of daily living. The effect is that of a seemingly complete taxonomy of misconduct. From the metaphysical to the mundane, Ascham surveys the pious temperament in ruins, discovering at each interval one more consequence of Catholicism’s bad example.

By way of amplifying the nature of Circean enchantment, Ascham de-

Piteous Lamentation of the Miserable Estate of the Church of England [London: William Powell, 1566], Aii^v). Thomas Becon writes *The Actes of Christe and of Antichriste* (London: John Day, 1577). John Foxe writes *Eicasmī seu meditationes, in sacram apocalypsin* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1587).

²⁵ Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 229.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

scribes how young Englishmen who suffer under such rhetorical thrall “ryde” to Italy as men possessed:

I am affraide, that over many of our travelers into *Italie* do not exchewe the way to Circes Court: but go, and ryde, and runnne, and flie thether, they make great haste to come to her; they make great sute to serve her: yea, I could point out some with my finger, that never had gone out of England, but onelie to serve Circes, in *Italie*.²⁷

On a syntactical level, Ascham uses an increasingly energetic progression of verbs to create a mood of frenzy in the sentence. The verbal *expasia* gives the passage a bacchanalian momentum, recalling the possessed maidens from Plato's *Ion*, for instance, or recalling Renaissance descriptions of midnight Sabbaths, where witches dance frenetically under the full moon. Moreover, Ascham's verbs create a feeling of preternatural adjuration, or spell casting, and this is not by coincidence. He recounts Circe's commands: “go,” “ryde,” “runne,” “flie,” where susceptible Englishmen fall prey to her demonic rhetoric, following her willingly—though unwittingly—into despair. In conventional exorcisms of the day, priests adjure demons to ride and run and flee back to hell, but this does not happen in Ascham's description.²⁸ Rather, Circe performs an inverted form of sacred rhetoric, not repelling students from demonry, but instead drawing them towards demonry in what amounts to a moment of profound irony. Circe charms them, and Ascham illustrates this charm through the rhetorical figuration of the passage itself. He appropriates the rhetoric of witchcraft in order to provide a catechistic lesson, exposing the Italianated Englishmen as individuals in league with the Devil, and, by logical extension, in league with the Devil's intermediary on earth: Rome.²⁹

It should also be noted that these preternatural elements, widespread witchcraft and demonic possession, functioned as commonplace portents of the apocalypse in most Renaissance demonologies, Catholic and Protestant.³⁰ Theologians took the accelerated advent of witchcraft in particular

²⁷ Ibid., 228.

²⁸ On demonic possession, exorcism, and rhetoric, see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 389–422. See also Hilaire Kallendorf, “The Rhetoric of Exorcism,” *Rhetorica* 23 (2005): 209–37; Armando Maggi, *Satan's Rhetoric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 21–53.

²⁹ Ascham recalls the harlot mentioned by John in Revelation 17.

³⁰ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 363–422.

as a probable indicator of Satan's final rage, a sentiment forcefully expressed by Heinrich Kramer in *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486): "And so in this twilight and evening of the world, when sin is flourishing on every side and in every place, when charity is growing cold, the evil of witches and their iniquities superabound."³¹ For many Catholic theologians, the Reformation simply exacerbated an already dire situation; it was part and parcel of pandemonium's hastening, while the Reformers saw the spread of Catholicism as the main problem. Regardless, both sides (or all sides) interpreted the age's tumult as evidence of the world's impending destruction, and Ascham's pronounced concerns about witchcraft and demonry throughout *The Schoolmaster* speak directly to this apocalyptic angst. He notices a world brimming with evil, or what the Calvinist Pierre Viret characterizes as *Le monde a l'empire et le monde demoniacle*—*The world possessed by devils* (1561). Furthermore, Ascham urges his readers to take heed, most likely to prepare them for the possibility of apocalypse, if not its imminence, and most assuredly to fortify their faith against Catholic allurements.

In another allusion to demonry—one that anticipates the discussion of Circe's court—Ascham describes what happens to English students who succumb to the "vaine sightes" and "filthie taulke" of Catholic education. Their "myndes [. . .] fall seick, and sone vomet and cast up, all the hole-some doctrine" that they "received in childhoode."³² Italianated students, as Ascham figures the passage, do not speak with proper English eloquence. Rather, they vomit language, which is a standard image in Renaissance demonology. Those possessed by the Devil produce a type of anti-eloquence often characterized by metaphors of regurgitation, an especially repulsive form of circumlocution.³³ Ascham applies this commonplace trope in order to clarify the condition of students who submit to Italian influences and, more generally, to Catholic culture. They suffer demonic possession, in this case, linguistic possession. Consequently, the Protestant eloquence that Ascham teaches in *The Schoolmaster* undergoes a diabolical inversion. It is cast up, or made perverse, by the Italianated student, and this perversion of eloquence serves as one more piece of evidence in Ascham's broader argument contrasting Christian and Antichristian impulses in every nook, cranny, and embedded clause of existence.

George Parks notes that the idea of the Italianated Englishmen began

³¹ Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. Montague Summers (London: John Rodker, 1928), 16.

³² Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 204.

³³ Maggi, *Satan's Rhetoric*, 33.

as a gracious description, not a negative one.³⁴ He shows how William Thomas used the image in his *Historie of Italie* (1549) as evidence of English refinement.³⁵ Ascham obviously has a different idea in mind, as does Thomas Wilson in his Protestant minded *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), which foreshadows Ascham's argument. Wilson, who suffered torture at the hands of Catholic officials, complains about the evil nature of the "Englishe" language "Italianated," by which he meant the idiom used by his countrymen who had fallen under the "thralldome and forriegen bondage" of Rome and so had corrupted the proper use of English rhetoric.³⁶ Ascham shares these sentiments, participating with Wilson in creating the negative impression of the Italianated Englishmen. Ascham, however, expresses his concerns in more artful and allegorical ways, avoiding the sort of vulgar confrontation that would have been inconvenient in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, which is when *The Schoolmaster* circulated in manuscript form, probably beginning in 1563. Nevertheless, the basic symbolism is clear and sharp. Circe, representing Catholicism in Ascham's argument, continues to loom as a threat to Protestant rhetoric and religion, an idea that perhaps rings true until the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

Along with Circe and her court, many other demonic figures appear on the pages of *The Schoolmaster*; it is a more disturbing and a more disturbed book than has ever been acknowledged. *The Schoolmaster* teems with monsters, "Siren songes," and shadows.³⁷ The book is full of "deadlie Denne[s]" into which improperly educated students might plummet, and the entire pedagogy is framed vehemently and vividly by the accelerated conflict between "GOD and the Devill."³⁸ When taken in aggregate, these disquieting images cast a useful light upon the nature of Ascham's humanism, and, by extension, upon much of Renaissance humanism, which is decidedly apocalyptic in quality.³⁹ The category of "apocalyptic humanism" is not

³⁴ George Parks, "The First Italianate Englishmen," *Studies in the Renaissance* 8 (1961): 197–216.

³⁵ Thomas, *Historie of Italie* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1549), A2.

³⁶ Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique*, ed. G.H. Mair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 162.

³⁷ Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 226.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 224, 233.

³⁹ On aspects of Renaissance humanism and rhetoric, see John Monfasani, "Humanism and Rhetoric," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, ed. Albert Rabil, Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 3:171–235; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 242–60; Hanna H. Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence," *JHI* 24 (1963): 497–514. On some key spiritual ideals in humanist thought, see Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

commonly used, but it should be! Such a phrase captures the mood of the period, and it reminds readers that one important project of Christian humanism—perhaps the central project—was to place the world in relationship to the Last Judgment. God's final evaluation of human activity charges it with purpose. And to this end, towards God's favorable judgment, Ascham organizes his classical allusions, which are aimed primarily at reinforcing Christian ethical and rhetorical principles. Or, put differently, Ascham's references to classical monsters (e.g., "cruell Cyclops," "Scylla," "Carybdis," etc.) have very little to do with classicism as such: he is a world away from antiquarianism.⁴⁰ Ascham translates the creatures of the ancient world into the framework of Protestant theology, much as Spencer later accomplishes in the *Faerie Queene*, where the monsters appear as metonyms for various types of despair, revealing through antithesis the path of salvation.⁴¹ Circe, representing the Catholic Church, functions as the key to the allegorical map, and the other villains complete the continuum of temptations and sins—a Boschian backdrop of sorts for Ascham's pedagogy. Understood in its full context, *The Schoolmaster's* monstrosity is the world's monstrosity, and in both its origins and its eschatology are to be discovered the Devil's ceaseless war on heaven. The duty of Ascham's schoolmaster, therefore, is to arm students with the idiom of English Protestantism, before they travel—literally and linguistically—beyond the household, the Reformed Church, and the Bible.

True to his pedagogical mission, Ascham furthermore contends that habits of reading and writing, good or bad, prove more influential to the well being of England than subtle religious disputation, which perhaps explains his choice of genre. He warns readers specifically against bawdy stories "of late translated out of *Italian* into English" and "commended by honest titles the soner to corrupt honest maners."⁴² Among other texts, Ascham has in mind narratives from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, some of them "mery," that is, prurient.⁴³ Not restricting himself to the continent, he also refers to Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* as a corrupting Catholic-style influence upon English society. "The whole pleasure" of the "book," he argues, "standeth in two speciall poyntes, in open mans slaughter, and bold bawdrye," where the "noblest Knightes" kill "men without any quarrel and

⁴⁰ Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 225.

⁴¹ Merritt Hughes suggests that "all Circes of the Renaissance illuminate Spencer's Acrasia," but some certainly shine brighter than others, for example, Ascham's Circe ("Spencer's Acrasia and the Circe of the Renaissance," *JHI* 4 [1943]: 381–99).

⁴² Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 229.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 230.

commit foulest adultires by sublest shifts.”⁴⁴ While the Marian Catholics “banished” the English Bible from the court, Ascham notes that *Mortre Darthur* still found its way into the royal bedchamber.⁴⁵ These types of books damage the culture, he suggests, because they “subvert trewe Religion” by corrupting honest living: “Ten Sermons at Paules Crosse do not so moch good for movyng men to trewe doctrine, as one of those bookes do harm, with inticing men to ill living.”⁴⁶ In fact, Ascham insists that more “Papistes” are “made” by the “merry bookes of *Italie*” than by the “earnest bookes of Louvain,” a reference to a prominent Catholic seminary.⁴⁷

Ascham, of course, sounds more dismissive of Reformation preaching than he actually is. His remark about St. Paul’s Cross is touched by hyperbole. Although Ascham believes in the power of preaching, he also knows that sermons by themselves will not protect Protestant England from the destructive influences in the popular culture, many of which he associates directly with Catholicism. Luther made a similar connection. Upon visiting Rome, Luther noticed much social deviance, and he diagnosed the problem as symptomatic of Catholic theology.⁴⁸ Ascham’s description of his own trip to Italy invokes these Lutheran arguments, especially when he notes the “brothelhouses,” “open lecherie,” and other forms of “misorder” marring the country and the religion.⁴⁹ This type of Lutheran cultural diagnosis is routine in Protestant philosophy, including Ascham’s philosophy of eloquence, where the discourses and habits of Catholic popular culture appear as more dangerous threats to English society than the doctrinal influences stemming from renowned seminaries.

Ascham sets the conflict between God and the Devil in the context of English language instruction. He then raises the same question that educators throughout history have raised. What books should students read? His answer is somewhat predictable, but still interesting. First, as already suggested, he provides a clear idea about what kinds of books students should not read. Secondly, he forwards a curriculum in the tradition of Christian humanism, noting the importance of Plato, Isocrates, Cicero, Horace, and other ancient writers, and noting as well the importance of Holy Scripture. Ascham illustrates the pleasure of this curriculum in unconventional ways,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 231.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 230.

⁴⁸ Martin Luther, “The Pagan Servitude of the Church,” in *The Reformation Writings of Martin Luther*, ed. and trans. Bertram Woolf (London: James Clarke, 2002), 1: 208–329.

⁴⁹ Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, 234–35.

however. For instance, he tells a story about discovering Jane Grey reading Plato in her personal chamber, overwhelmed by the enjoyment of learning the classics:

Before I went to Germanie, I came to Brodegate in Lecetershire, to take my leave of that noble Ladie *Jane Grey*, to whom I was exceeding moch beholdinge. Hir parentes, the Duke and Duches, with all the houshold, Gentlemen and Gentlewomen, were huntinge in the Parke: I found her, in her Chamber, reading *Phaedon Platonis* in Greeke, and that with moch deliite, as som gentlemen wold read a merie tale in Bocase. After salutation, and dewtie done, with som other taulke, I asked hir, whie she wold leese soch pastime in the Parke? Smiling she answered me: I wisse, all their sport in the parke is but a shadoe to that pleasue, that I find in Plato.⁵⁰

In Ascham's era, like every era, the joy of learning edifies, but this is not Ascham's main point with the description. He goes out of his way to note the place, Grey's private chamber, thus creating a powerful juxtaposition between Gray's quarters and Queen Mary's, where a copy of *Morte Darthur* could be found. He indirectly argues that Jane had a healthy soul due to her reading habits, while Mary and her court did not. Because the Marian Catholics put Jane to death, Ascham's description of her also takes on the character of an epideictic elegy—and even a miniature martyr's tale in the mode of Foxe. Additionally, Ascham compliments Aylmer, who must be given some of the credit for Grey's learning, which she acknowledges: "One of the greatest benefites, that ever God gave me," Jane reports, is "that he sent me [. . .] so gentle a scholemaster [i.e., John Aylmer]." ⁵¹ Ascham provides a portrait of the nine days queen, and through *The Schoolmaster* offers the deeper Protestant rational for her death. While in service of proper religion, she suffered at the hands of what Aylmer describes as "antichrist's and Satan's guard."⁵²

More generally, throughout his critique of demonic rhetoric, Ascham rightly notices how a weak educational system combined with a poisonous culture proves hazardous to civilization, a point relevant in every epoch, including our own. Ascham's answer to the problem is equally relevant, assuming that we approach it with some flexibility and discernment. Society

⁵⁰ Ibid., 201.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Aylmer, *A Harborowe*, A4^c.

ought to provide students with a sophisticated rhetorical education, offering the skills necessary to distinguish between edifying and despairing forms of eloquence.

CONCLUSION

By the time *The Schoolmaster* was published, the argument connecting Catholicism and witchery was commonplace in Protestant circles, and it explained why Mary's government vigorously persecuted figures such as Cranmer, Latimer, and Cheke. Mary and other Catholics perceived witchery in the very charges of witchcraft leveled against them, as the Age of Antithesis required. The Marian Catholic John Christopherson aptly illustrates this point when he likens Henry VIII's doctrines to trees growing upsidedown: "the old mens saying was herein verified, that when Antichrist shulde come, the roots of the trees shulde grow upwarde."⁵³ Christopherson captures the preposterousness of the Reformation, by Catholic standards, a topsy-turvy world that signals the Devil's involvement. Like the Reformers, the Catholics used descriptions of demonry to reject competing forms of theology, figuring such theology as either heresy or witchery, near synonyms for Counter Reformers, as indicated by the Counter Reformation's most popular antimetabole: witchcraft leads to heresy, and heresy leads to witchcraft. Mary, however, did not see witchery in Ascham, and this is surprising, or at least difficult to explain. As early as *Toxophilus*, Ascham formulated the same Protestant critique of Rome that Ridley accomplished, and yet he did not find himself in extreme controversy, that is, burned at the stake, Ridley's bloodless punishment.

One of the more interesting and puzzling aspects of Ascham's career involves his role in Mary's court. He never attempted to erase his Protestant sensibility, but unlike several other Reformers, he was not put to death for it or forced to recant it. Contrarily, Ascham served as Mary's Latin secretary. Several explanations for this are possible, two of which I will note. First, perhaps Mary hoped that he would convert. He did not. As evidenced by the attitudes expressed in *The Schoolmaster*, quite the opposite took place. Ascham became increasingly committed to the Reformation, and, in more specific terms, he became increasingly determined to establish English as an important language—one to rival Latin. This desire stemmed from

⁵³ John Christopherson, *An Exhortation to All Menne to Take Hede of Rebellion* (London: John Cawood, 1554), Tii.

his Protestant reaction against the Latin mass, and, more generally, against Catholic empire. Ascham patiently waited for the day when the English Bible and *The Book of Common Prayer* were once again officially instituted, as Cranmer and others had temporarily accomplished even before Mary's ascension.

As a second possibility, perhaps Ascham forged a personal friendship with Mary that earned her devotion beyond ordinary circumstances. Mary might have allowed his Protestant behavior under some sort of special exceptions clause. Johnson puts a version of this explanation in its proper perspective: "At that time, if some were punished, many were forborne; and of many why should not Ascham happen to be one? He seems to have been calm and prudent, and content with that peace which he was suffered to enjoy: a mode of behavior that seldom fails to produce security."⁵⁴ This is the more likely explanation.

As a result of Mary's favor towards Ascham, something important happened that changed the course of English society. Ascham lived to teach the next generation of students and also the mature Elizabeth, who, even more than Mary, expressed devotion towards him. Unlike Mary's devotion, however, Elizabeth's had revolutionary implications. Through Elizabeth, the Church of England definitively separated itself from Rome, and Ascham played a role in this development. He taught the queen an appreciation for key Protestant beliefs, including the importance of a powerful English idiom, a national literature, and a "proper" religion. For Ascham, the achievement of a true English eloquence spoke to all of these issues. Indeed, the salvation of Elizabethan society depended upon sound rhetorical training. Consequently, the fluency that Ascham prized in *The Schoolmaster* began to flourish under the auspices of Elizabeth's court, giving rise to one of the greatest intellectual periods in the history of England, dramatically punctuated by the most famous inheritor of Aschamite eloquence: William Shakespeare. The irony, of course, is that the notion of a new golden age was the farthest thing from Ascham's mind. He was instead preoccupied with visions of witchcraft, demonic possession, and other portents of the world's twilight.

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⁵⁴ Johnson, *Works*, 6: 515–16.

*Malebranche, Taste, and Sensibility: The Origins of Sensitive Taste and a Reconsideration of Cartesianism's Feminist Potential*¹

Katharine J. Hamerton

The difference which one remarks in the man and the woman, comes not only from education, but also from their nature. The fibers of the woman are ordinarily more slender, which makes the senses more fine, and the interior sentiment more delicate.

This natural disposition makes them prefer perceptible objects to metaphysical realities, amiable qualities to essential qualities, the brilliant to the solid, luxury and ostentation to cleanliness and commodity.

It's also what makes them sensitive to piety, inconstant and light, and often capricious. The trace which objects leave there not being profound enough, it is easily effaced by a new impression: in such a way that in their minds the present object often sweeps away that which is absent.²

Thus observed the literary compiler Didier Pierre Chicaneau de Neuillé in 1751, in a then typically physiological explanation for women's mental

¹ Thanks to Naomi Andrews, Stephen Asma, Lorraine Daston, who brought Malebranche to my attention, Jan Goldstein, the *JHI* reviewers, Universities of Sussex and Chicago workshop participants, and Society for French Historical Studies audiences.

² [Didier Pierre Chicaneau de Neuillé], *Dictionnaire philosophique* (London, 1751), s.v., "Femme. Homme," 147–48.

processes and superficial taste. Slender nervous fibers meant extreme susceptibility to sensory stimulation and a delicate lightness of impression, “easily effaced,” and scientized women’s well known love of novelty and fashion and inability to concentrate and pursue “those sciences which derive from the rivalry between reasonings and sustained judgments,” as the Vitalist physician Antoine Le Camus put it two years later. Le Camus’s explanation for women’s “particular *finesse d’esprit* and delicacy” was identical to Neuillé’s: “This singular and distinctive genius of women obliges us to have recourse to a more special cause than climates, education, the regime of life and the temperaments; it is the primordial conformation. The fibers of feminine bodies are much more weak and of a much more slack tissue than those of men. Thus the fibers of the brain being delicate, they will cause by their vibrations a certain delicacy in the impressions, delicacy that will be remarked in everything.”³

Neuillé and Le Camus typify a mid-century French presumption that women’s mental judgments, characteristics, and predilections were due to an extraordinarily sensitive and reactive female nervous system, and express a contemporaneous interpretive trend that explicitly repudiated any notion that women’s intellectual abilities or aesthetic preferences could be adequately explained by history, culture or education. Instead, such interpreters fixated on the scientized explanation that the sexed body was determinative of a timeless, unchangeable sexed mind, transparently revealed in its (contemporary) cultural trivialities and tastes. The physiological claims they favored had, by the 1760s, so deeply “naturalized [the] female intellect” that it was simply common sense for Rousseau to state, “the only thing we know with certainty is that everything man and woman have in common belongs to the species, and that everything which distinguishes them” (which was almost everything, for Rousseau), “belongs to the sex.” In *Emile*, the assumption that a woman’s tastes reflected her natural constitution and destination—pleasing men—was foundational.⁴ While contemporary French or Parisian manifestations of this femininity were frequently criticized as excessive and false, by Rousseau among others, they were, by this point, seen as no more than cultural variations on what had become polarized and biologically determined sexed behaviors. That these essentialized activities and tastes were causing the degeneration of French taste and cultural productions which Rousseau and other critics were witnessing,

³ Antoine Le Camus, *Médecine de l’esprit* (Paris, 1753), 2: 206–7, 198, 200.

⁴ Lorraine Daston, “The Naturalized Female Intellect,” *Science in Context* 5 (1992): 209–35; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (1979), 358.

was, they thought, due to women's present ill-advised social predominance and influence, which in earlier centuries or other societies were kept in better check and certainly had less in the way of urban and market opportunity. Female nature, however, had, for most observers, become a biological constant by mid-century, whatever historical manifestations it might express in particular cultures, urban or rural settings, and eras, depending on whether correctly channeled, overly repressed, or—always a bad idea—allowed to run wild.

This “moment in the history of thought when the body was not defined by the social and the psychic, but rather, vice-versa,” has been explored in recent works that illustrate the freighted nature of women's sensibility in post-1770 France.⁵ Research on women's taste supports their findings that the culturally dominant paradigm of physiological sensibility was then seriously problematic for French women, indeed, as early as the 1750s.⁶ Here, however, I locate an important 1674 instance of physiological gendering of sensibility and taste. Even in a period whose positive aspects for women have frequently been noted, when women's taste enjoyed (a not uncontested) cultural dominance, when the mind, due to the freeing potential of Cartesianism, might, in Poulain de la Barre's celebrated words, “ha[ve] no sex,” and when the salons of the day remained feminocentric, if not feminist, there were indications of the gender trouble to come.⁷

The limiting nature of late eighteenth-century attempts to reduce women to the body is well known, as is the notion that Cartesianism contained liberating possibilities for women and feminist thought, but as far as women were concerned, these streams of thought were not always as far apart as has sometimes been thought. Literary scholars and historians have generally seen potential for women in Cartesian substance dualism, with Poulain epitomizing how it became possible to argue that “the mind—distinct from the body—has no sex” and that “because reason is separated

⁵ Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology* (Baltimore, 1998), 4; Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex*, trans. Pamela E. Selwyn (New York, 1995); cf. Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), chap. 7.

⁶ Katharine J. Hamerton, “Women's Taste in the French Enlightenment” (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2002), chap. 5.

⁷ François Poullain de la Barre, *Three Cartesian Feminist Treatises*, ed. Marcelle Maistre Welch, trans. Vivien Bosley (Chicago, 2002), 82; Schiebinger 165–78; Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes* (Princeton, 1976); Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies* (New York, 1991); Linda Timmermans, *L'accès des femmes à la culture (1598–1715)* (Paris, 1993); Faith Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France* (Aldershot, England, 2006).

from the body, physical traits exercise no direct influence over cognition.”⁸ In fact, such arguments have overemphasized the rigid impermeability of this mind-body dualism and thus its liberating possibilities, by downplaying the complexity of Cartesian thought in the seventeenth century, in which the body’s role in obtaining knowledge and its impact on the passions, emotions, imagination, and sensibility, remained very salient.⁹ Without seeking to diminish its strong appeal to seventeenth-century women, I will suggest that Cartesianism’s less than impermeable boundaries between interacting mind and body, conjoined with the reality of some degree of ongoing sexualization of the body present in the thought of most writers on women,¹⁰ including Cartesians, imply that Cartesianism did not necessarily promise rational liberation to women, or necessarily negate a gendered physiological essentialism. In some hands, it could in fact result in conclusions very close to those of the later eighteenth century’s more straightforward materialist essentialism.

An outspoken feminist with three books on the subject (1673–75), Poulain did argue that “since the mind functions no differently in one sex than in the other, it is capable of the same things in both,” and clearly he illustrates the liberating potential Cartesianism could have for seventeenth-century women, as do those seventeenth- and eighteenth-century feminists who invoked him.¹¹ But the received view that his feminist arguments were premised on mind-body *separation* is inadequate, for he also claimed as evidence for women’s mental equality, identical cerebral anatomy and physiological sensory processes in both sexes.¹² Further, he used physiological arguments about innate *heightened* female sensitivity and physical delicacy that drew upon *honnête* cultural stereotypes and conventional medical theories to explain women’s *superior* mental qualities—rapid and accurate perception, “discernment and correct thinking,” “imagination, memory,

⁸ Schiebinger, 176; Steinbrügge, 12, cf. 37. See Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700–1950* (Stanford, 2000), 34; Maistre Welch in Poulain, 47–48; Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford, 2006), 572–73, 575; Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women* (Ithaca, 1992), 81, 169.

⁹ Susan James, *Passion and Action* (Oxford, 1997); Siep Stuurman, *François Poulain de la Barre and the Invention of Modern Equality* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004).

¹⁰ See Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge, 1980); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); cf. Stuurman.

¹¹ Poulain, 82; also 95. On the appeal of Cartesianism to seventeenth-century feminists, see Harth; Sarah Hutton, “Women Philosophers and the Early Reception of Descartes: Anne Conway and Princess Elisabeth,” in *Receptions of Descartes*, ed. Tad M. Schmaltz (London, 2005).

¹² Poulain, 83, 86, 100; see Stuurman.

and brilliance,” and fluent speech.¹³ Poulain deployed such arguments (and others on prejudice, education, and social structures) for feminist purposes. As Siep Stuurman has observed, “Poulain’s feminism, despite its forceful emphasis on equality, also contains a subtext on female virtue and difference.”¹⁴

My examination of the Cartesian philosopher and Oratorian Nicolas Malebranche’s views on women’s taste, which appeared the year after Poulain’s *De l’Égalité des deux sexes*, argues that Malebranche materially limited women’s intellectual achievements from within Cartesianism. It thus joins recent work which from various vantage points has raised questions about Cartesianism’s necessarily rationalist feminist potential because of its dualism.¹⁵ Both Poulain and Malebranche invoked the epistemological influence of women’s heightened bodily sensitivity, but where Poulain sometimes underscored bodily similarity to underpin egalitarianism—“Since all people are cast in a similar mold, they are always moved by things in a similar way”—Malebranche consistently emphasized the epistemological impact of bodily—including sexual—difference, explicitly sexing cerebral and nervous matter and drawing negative conclusions about female mental capacity.¹⁶ When he analyzed women’s taste, he presented the female mind as deeply, inherently, essentially sexed in its corrupt dependence on the female body.

My broader focus is on the longer-term ramifications for women’s taste of thinking that women were creatures of their physiological sensibility. This led to strange conclusions by around 1750, for even though it was then generally accepted that sensibility was the source of taste and that women had more sensibility, it became common to argue that women’s taste was imperfect, because excessively, or superficially, sensitive.¹⁷ By examining Malebranche, I seek to reveal the roots of this view in an influential late seventeenth-century text, and show that deriving women’s taste from a heightened physiological sensitivity occurred much earlier than has been recognized. Long before Vitalist physicians and moral anthropologists were arguing that women’s sensitive nature was fixed while man’s was perfectible, Malebranche was making similar claims.¹⁸

¹³ Poulain, 83, 91, 100–101, 113; Stuurman downplays physiological difference in Poulain while acknowledging ambiguity, 83–86; cf. chap. 3.

¹⁴ Stuurman, 20.

¹⁵ Different approaches are found in Stuurman; Israel, 576.

¹⁶ Poulain, 86.

¹⁷ Hamerton, “Women’s Taste,” chap. 5; cf. Steinbrügge, 98–99.

¹⁸ Vila, 256.

Readers interested in seventeenth-century discussions of taste may balk at this point, for what did taste have to do with physiological sensibility in this period? They would rightly be suspicious, for the accepted belief is that to derive taste from organic sensibility was part of a “sensualist psychology not yet known in the seventeenth century.” To do so would have rendered taste “suspect” to the *honnête* Parisian elites who cultivated and discussed the faculty. Received opinion has it that the abbé Du Bos, the most influential writer on taste and aesthetics in Enlightenment France, originated the physiological model of sensitive aesthetic reception in his 1719 *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*. Claude Chantalat thus distinguishes him from earlier theorists: “For him, sentiment is a physical emotion, linked to the reaction of the organs.”¹⁹ But analyzing Malebranche shows that taste was thought of in physiological terms much earlier. To an extent, this may be said of Descartes’s analysis of passionate responses to beauty, but it is with Malebranche that we see a fully developed, and highly gendered, physiological approach to taste, enmeshed with important claims that taste was a flawed source of understanding the world. I will thus be backdating and linking several phenomena, showing that the overdetermining gendering of sensibility that exploded after 1750 had begun to develop in philosophical discourse as early as the 1670s, that these physiological limitations to the female mind took place within the bosom of Cartesianism, and that taste was physiologized decades before Du Bos.

MALEBRANCHE ON TASTE

Malebranche provides my evidence for these claims. At the high point of seventeenth-century consensus on women’s superior taste, he formulated what would become an important gendered critique of taste, and an influential physiological theory of the property, in *De la recherche de la vérité* (1674–75), his monumental analysis—with a view to salvation—of the nature of the human mind and of the avoidance of error. A central theme is the negative impact of the body’s perceptions on the mind’s access to truth; in this light, Malebranche analyzed taste.

Famous for his occasionalism and theory of vision in God, Malebranche has never been extensively studied for his thought on taste, for multiple reasons, many of them good. No devoted philosopher of taste, his treat-

¹⁹ Claude Chantalat, *A la recherche du goût classique* (Paris, 1992), 62 and n. 8. Histories of aesthetics that thus depict Du Bos are too numerous to cite.

ment of taste takes up scant space in a massive *oeuvre* consecrated by philosophers for its more central aspects. He did not readily fit into or share the values of the worldly camp of *honnête* commentators, like Madeleine de Scudéry, Méré, La Rochefoucauld, Saint-Evremond, or Bouhours, whose definitions and theories of taste circulated in the Parisian salons and were canonized in the first French dictionaries; this, combined with long-respected disciplinary boundaries—the canons of literature and philosophy—has contributed to his being overlooked by literary scholars who study taste and *honnête* culture. Traditional philosophical focus on Cartesian rationalism has led historians of aesthetic philosophy to invoke Malebranche in terms of occasionalism, love of order, or vision in God, with little or no importance placed on his physiology.²⁰ When the *Recherche* first appeared, Malebranche's depiction of taste as the illusory product of delicate brain and nervous fibers and circulating animal spirits in the blood was idiosyncratic, extraordinary in the 1670s (Descartes had identified the love of beauty as an unreliable sensitive passion, but had not provided an extensive physiological analysis of it; see below). Along with the overwhelming later reputation of Du Bos, this must have helped obscure Malebranche's contribution: thus, for Chantalat, "No one, or almost no one, dreamed of considering [taste] as the manifestation of a sensibility of an organic nature, which was held suspect" at this time (she excepts only Morvan de Bellegarde, who apparently did so in passing).²¹ That Malebranche (1638–1715) continued to critique taste on the grounds of the body's misleading influence on the mind in the six subsequent editions of the *Recherche* he revised by 1712, over four decades during which sensibility and a more positively regarded nervous epistemology were beginning to achieve broader acceptance and undermine Cartesianism, also seems pertinent.²² Before modern

²⁰ Arsène Soreil, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'esthétique française* (Brussels, 1955), 101–2; Jacques Chouillet, *L'Esthétique des lumières* (Paris, 1974), 48–49; Francis X. J. Coleman, *The Aesthetic Thought of the French Enlightenment* (Pittsburgh, 1971), 13–14 (cf. 6).

²¹ Chantalat, 62 and n. 9.

²² Jean Mesnard, "Le classicisme français et l'expression de la sensibilité," in *Expression, Communication and Experience in Literature and Language*, ed. Ronald G. Popperwell (London, 1973), 28–37; John S. Spink, "'Sentiment', 'sensible', 'sensibilité': les mots, les idées, d'après les 'moralistes' français et britanniques du début du dix-huitième siècle," *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 20 (1977): 34–35; Frank Baasner, "The Changing Meaning of 'Sensibilité': 1654 till 1704," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 15 (Madison, Wis., 1986), 77–96; Joan DeJean, *Ancients Against Moderns* (Chicago, 1997); G. S. Rousseau, "Nerves, Spirits, and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility," in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century III*, ed. R.F. Brissenden and J.C. Eade (Toronto, 1976), 137–57; Ross Hutchison, *Locke in France, 1688–1734* (Oxford, 1991).

academic feminism, Malebranche's blatant gendering of taste and the potential impact on women of his theories went unremarked. Then, initially, feminist philosophers tended to overdraw the mind-body split in their critiques of Cartesian rationalism, in line with a general disciplinary overemphasis on rationalism; only recently have more realistic accounts of Cartesian mind-body interaction (whether feminist, as in Poulain, or otherwise), been achieved.²³ Meanwhile, feminist literary scholars and historians, as noted above, have mostly concentrated on Cartesianism's feminist potential. Longstanding assumptions and disciplinary approaches have thus obscured Malebranche's existence and influence as a moral critic of taste, as well as his derogatory and gendered physiology of taste.

Some studies have pointed towards Malebranche's significance in this light, though glancingly. Anne Becq's magisterial work on the development of French aesthetic thought, noting that historians of aesthetics have overlooked Malebranche, argues that his concept of affective interior sentiment was instrumental in leading to eighteenth-century aesthetic thought. Becq rightly distinguishes this sentiment, a function of God's grace for Malebranche, from sentiment as equivalent to sensation, which he accorded a flawed but positive status as instantaneous and accurate instinct for bodily preservation. Tensions arising from the two strains of meaning led to early eighteenth-century debates and eventually, Becq suggests, a broader form of reason; Malebranchean sentiment was especially influential on Du Bos, who expanded its purview into the aesthetic realm, paving the way towards modern aesthetics in France.²⁴ This is a compelling thesis which I am not contesting here (Malebranche's embrace of certain aspects of sensibility, for instance, as a necessary human quality for binding society together, a position he took in opposition to neo-Stoicism, is indeed extremely important, both representative of a trend, and influential).²⁵ My focus is more limited, as is my critique of this approach: while Becq acknowledges the drawbacks of sentiment in not registering the reality of external objects (only their

²³ See James, chap. 1; Stuurman, 9–10, 120–23; and Hutton, 4–5, for references and valuable comments on such approaches; James and Stuurman provide nuanced understandings of Cartesianism.

²⁴ Annie Becq, *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne, 1680–1814* (Paris, 1994), 173–86 and passim; on Du Bos, 248 ff.

²⁵ Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, trans. and ed. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge, 1997), 182–83. I have occasionally modified this translation of the 1712 edition, using Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, ed., *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche* (Paris, 1962), vols. 1–3 (OC). Where I emphasize the earliness of Malebranche's claims, I have checked earlier variations here, but have not noted those unrelated to my argument.

relation to the perceiver), she generally ignores the specifics of Malebranche's physiology of sensing, taste or imagination (the latter of which she dismisses as "archaic"²⁶): she thus fails to consider the ramifications of his explicitly negative and highly gendered arguments about these flawed perceptions. While it is true that sentiment as the God-given love of order that counterbalances man's love of self is critical in Malebranche, he also had important things to say about the faculty of taste itself, and its derivation from the deceptive senses and imagination. The epistemological erroneous-ness of all three is critical in his thought, and had a considerable legacy in later analyses of women's tasteful and creative capacities. Likewise, Susan James rightly notes Malebranche's "relentlessly optimistic interpretation" of the mechanical nature of God's plan for the body's self-preservation through the passions, and his pessimism regarding our sinful postlapsarian pull towards the sensible with its negative implications for redemption, although she too lays no real emphasis on the important gender dimension of Malebranche's assignment of women to the superficial and damagingly distracting domain of taste.²⁷ Several scholars have commented in passing on Malebranche's gendered psychology or physiology of women's taste, or nodded to his influence, but the extent of the importance and novelty of his contributions, and the problems inherent in his arguments have, to my knowledge, received little focused attention or clear explication; apart from the work of Linda Timmermans, Malebranche's thought on taste has not been considered with attention to the broader cultural context informing his critique, and has sometimes been confusingly presented in completely decontextualized fashion.²⁸ It has been argued that Malebranche accords women a different kind of reason, but he was not so much redefining female reason as physiologically limiting women's access to a general human reason from within an emerging psychological model of gendered nervous sensibility.²⁹ Malebranche's gendered epistemology and physiology of taste, in short, still warrant extensive attention and clarification through a close and contextualized reading.

Pace Chantalat, Malebranche *did* consider taste an entirely suspect manifestation of organic sensibility. For this Cartesian cleric, human reac-

²⁶ Becq, 173.

²⁷ James, 8, 116–17, 119–20, 122–23.

²⁸ Stuurman, 91, 101; Mónica Bolufer Peruga, "'Neither Male Nor Female': Rational Equality in the Early Spanish Enlightenment," in Knott and Taylor, 397–98; Timmermans, 169–70; Wendy Gibson, *Women in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York, 1989), 38, 193; Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex* (Bloomington, 1993), 68; Beasley, 36.

²⁹ Timothy J. Reiss, *The Meaning of Literature* (Ithaca, 1992), 205, 218.

tions to social behaviors, manners, music, language usages, conversational style, literature, fashionable, artistic or decorative objects, reactions that fall under the rubric of the imagination, the senses, and taste, were superficial and led people to veer off the rocky road to truth as trod by the faculty of reason.³⁰ Taste was a sensory and imaginative quality essentially attuned to the sensual world, thus epistemological error incarnate. It was most certainly Malebranche's intent to attack taste, those gendered beings most closely associated with it, and the polite and feminine milieux in which their false judgments might interfere with the search after truth.

MALEBRANCHE IN CONTEXT

The prevailing view on taste when the *Recherche* first appeared was that there were absolute standards of taste in accordance with true beauty, perceived not through reason, but in perfect harmony with it, and that certain groups (whether refined women, the *connoisseurs* or the *honnêtes gens*) had superior taste. Contemporary dictionaries and *honnête* theorists like Bouhours defined taste as "a harmony, an accord of the mind with reason," or "a kind of instinct of right reason which carries it [reason] along with rapidity and which conducts it more surely than all the reasonings it could make." Mysterious and automatic, taste was a rapid sentiment that required no reasoned thought process; as Méré put this in one of innumerable such examples, "good taste is always based on very solid reasons, but most often, without benefit of reasoning." Observers were fascinated by taste's instant arrival at the identical judgment for which reason required time and reflection. Effortless, instantaneous, taste's perfect judgments were the products of a labor-free mental grace that did not stoop to the work of reasoning. This view reflects the privileged contemporary epistemological status of reason's access to truth, combined with the value *mondains* placed on "living nobly" (i.e., idly), with their scorn for formal learning and academic pedantry. It illustrates the ethos of a leisured, casually educated salon and court society, in which the *honnête* judgments of polite women who lacked access to institutionalized education emblemized this elite's informally absorbed ideals of self-possession, good sense, lack of scholastic prejudice, good taste, and gracefulness.³¹

³⁰ Malebranche, e.g., 64, 76, 130, 170–71, 173–90, 384.

³¹ [Dominique Bouhours], *La Maniere de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit* (Amsterdam, 1688), 376–77; Antoine Gombauld, chevalier de Méré, *De la conversation*, in *Oeu-*

This vision contrasts strongly with Malebranche's emphasis on taste's embodied nature. His depiction clearly endangered taste's *honnête* status, for any rapid perusal of contemporary dictionary definitions will show how problematic it was at this time to acknowledge the bodily aspect of taste. The first French dictionaries differed in treating taste literally and figuratively (two senses dictionary editors had to juxtapose), revealing discomfort with the quality's material connotations. Different tastes for food were regarded with tolerance, following early modern dietary theories of temperaments ("Tastes are different"), but standards of correct aesthetic and social taste were asserted ("Man of good taste, man of bad taste. Said of someone who judges well or ill of things").³² The proverbial wisdom that "one cannot argue with taste," moreover, was invoked when speaking of tastes for food but not when discussing beauty.³³ This editorial approach informs us that the embodied nature of taste seemed ill suited to the dignity of its task and suspect to these dictionaries' editors (and perhaps readership), who did not want to see the mysterious and ineffable nature of *le bon goût* reduced to physicality, with the relativistic results for aesthetic judgment that might follow, as for gustatory taste, which reflected temperament.

But this was exactly the approach of Malebranche and, earlier, Descartes, who in 1649, considering the "Love . . . which one has for beautiful" things (termed *Agréement* or "Delight"; he did not use the term *goût*), categorized it as one of the passions—"perceptions or sensations or excitations of the soul . . . caused, maintained, and strengthened by some movement of the spirits . . . numbered among the perceptions which the close bond between the soul and the body renders confused and obscure," and "received into the soul in the same manner as the objects of the external senses." Unlike our understanding of good and evil, which "our internal senses or our reason makes us judge suitable or opposed to our nature, . . . we call beautiful or ugly what is so represented to us by our external senses," Des-

vres complètes, ed. Charles-H. Boudhors (Paris, 1930), 2: 128–29; Chantalat; Rémy G. Saisselin, *The Rule of Reason and the Ruses of the Heart* (Cleveland, 1970); Jean-Pierre Dens, *L'Honnête homme et la critique du goût* (Lexington, Ky., 1981); Michael Moriarty, *Taste & Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1988); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); Alain Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain* (Paris, 1985), 135.

³² Pierre Richelet, *Dictionnaire françois* (Geneva, 1693; Amsterdam, 1706), s.v. "Goût." See Moriarty, chap. 2, on four French dictionary definitions of taste from 1680 to 1701; on gustatory taste, see Jean-Louis Flandrin, "Distinction through Taste," in *Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Roger Chartier and trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 292–97.

³³ Moriarty, 58.

cartes explained. This sensory input was inherently defective, as the “passions of Delight and Abhorrence are usually more vigorous than the other species of Love and Hatred, because what comes to the soul represented by the senses affects it more forcibly than what is represented to it by its reason, and . . . nevertheless they ordinarily have less truth: so of all the passions it is these which deceive the most and which one must guard oneself against the most carefully.”³⁴

Malebranche’s analysis of taste, imagination, and sensations comprised traditional elements like animal spirits, but reflected the modern research agenda of the last third of the century, when the soul’s seat was firmly limited to the brain, with the nerves its sole providers of external information.³⁵ Malebranche knew the relevant anatomical and physiological discoveries of Thomas Willis, and the *Recherche* reflected the nerves’ new philosophical importance, even though Malebranche did not accord epistemological primacy to the senses as would Willis’s student Locke, worrying instead about their damaging epistemological influence.³⁶ He used the spirits and this new nervous physiology to explain “the natural or occasional cause” of human passions, feelings, and thoughts. Of course, Malebranche’s occasionalism denied the body’s necessary and independent causal influence on the mind: “It is this continuous and efficacious impression of the will of God on us that binds us so closely to one part of matter, and if this impression of His will should cease for but a moment, we would immediately be freed from our dependence upon the body and all the changes it undergoes. For I cannot understand how certain people imagine that there is an absolutely necessary relation between the movements of the spirits and blood and the emotions of the soul.”³⁷

But for such people, much of Malebranche’s message could easily resonate with their more straightforward theories of physical influence. Even for Malebranche, human beings in their fallen state were very much reduced to embodied creatures: “At the present time nature is undoubtedly corrupted—the body acts too forcefully on the mind. . . . After the Fall, the mind became, as it were, material and terrestrial.” This misleading impact of the body on accurate mental perception and reasoning is the *Recherche*’s guiding premise, the first paragraph of which states, “The mind’s union

³⁴ René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis, 1989), 34, 65.

³⁵ G. S. Rousseau.

³⁶ Thomas Willis, *Cerebri anatome* (1664) and *Pathologiae Cerebri* (1667); Malebranche cited Willis, e.g., 89, 97.

³⁷ Malebranche, 338.

with the body . . . infinitely debases man and is today the main cause of all his errors and miseries.”³⁸ Cartesian dualism and Augustinian pessimism are key to understanding Malebranche’s assault on taste, deceptive product of the mind-body union, problematic for all fallen mankind, but especially so for women.

MALEBRANCHE’S PHYSIOLOGY OF TASTE

For Malebranche, the soul perceives in three ways: through the pure understanding (weakest yet most accurate), the imagination (persuasively stronger, subject to error, and responsible for representing absent objects to the mind), and the senses (which perceive present objects, have the strongest influence, and are most false in their input).³⁹ Malebranche oscillated between attributing taste to the imagination or the senses. For example, when considering women’s taste in his treatment of the imagination’s general errors, he also treated it as a sensory response to present objects, and when analyzing musical tastes, he spoke of the imagination being “carried away” and of people having different “sensations of the same objects.”⁴⁰ He emphasized the “close relationship between the senses and the imagination [such] that they should not be separated . . . even . . . that the difference between these two faculties is but one of degree,” for the main distinction was only whether the nervous fibers were moved externally (sensing) or internally (imagining).⁴¹ Both sensing and imagining were erroneous, so in all events taste was immediately and innately epistemologically suspect. For while the senses necessarily exerted the greatest impact on the mind, because of their utility for bodily survival, they were also the source of the greatest errors, because they “do not represent things to [the soul] according to what they are in themselves but only according to their relation to the body”—it was their responsibility to protect the body—and (for the same utilitarian reason) because they distract the mind from less clamorous, but more important, matters of truth.⁴² And while Malebranche admitted that “the judgments we make concerning extension, figure, and motion of bodies include some measure of truth . . . the same is not true of those concerning light, colors, tastes, odors, and all the other sensible qualities,

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 339, xxxiii.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16–17, 79–80.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 130, 64, 427–28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 87–88.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 80; cf. 343.

for truth is never encountered here.”⁴³ Taste, as we are considering it, fell into this category of secondary qualities. As for the imagination, when he began his discussion of the general errors to which it was subject, he chose to commence with a section on women’s imaginations, where he immediately broached the topic of taste, thus directly linking the imagination and taste, in a discussion of the female mind under the rubric of error.⁴⁴

Two general influences, “the animal spirits and the disposition of the brain on which they act,” explained changes in the imagination, which then affected taste.⁴⁵ The animal spirits, “the most refined and agitated parts of the blood,” so small they could leave the bloodstream to enter the brain, whose presence, amount, refinement, and energy level were affected by food and alcohol intake, air quality, and internal “involuntary stimulation of certain nerves,” were responsible for individual imaginative idiosyncrasies (for example, through eating and drinking) and for national and local differences (regional air quality explained the distinct imaginations of Gascons and Normans, of inhabitants of Rouen and of Dieppe, and of Italians, Flemings, and Dutchmen, for example).⁴⁶ In contrast with the constantly changing levels and makeup of the spirits, the structure of the brain fibers changed slowly, providing a more fixed source of difference between human subgroups. Brain fibers were distinguished in delicacy, flexibility, strength, and moisture content by age, in childhood being “soft, flexible and delicate,” with maturity becoming “drier, harder, and stronger,” and “in old age they are completely inflexible, . . . also thick. . . . For just as . . . the fibers that make up flesh harden with time, and . . . the flesh of a young partridge is without doubt more tender than that of an old bird, so the brain fibers of a child or a young man must be much softer and more delicate than those of persons more advanced in age.” Malebranche attributed the toughening of aging to the constant desiccating motion of the spirits through the fibers, “for just as the winds dry the earth over which they blow, so the animal spirits through their continual agitation gradually render most of a man’s brain fibers drier, more compressed, and more solid.”⁴⁷ Sex differences also influenced the delicacy or firmness of the brain fibers (see below).

In this model, the combined permutations of stable structural anatomi-

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 130; see 87.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 91–95, 99.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 110–11; cf. 131–33.

cal differences and labile spirits created a tremendous range of imaginative and sensory dispositions, which then explained people's enormous variety of taste judgments. In emphasizing difference, Malebranche followed Descartes, who had explained "how the same cause can excite different passions in different men" by noting "that all brains are not disposed in the same manner."⁴⁸ As Malebranche explained:

Though the same motion of fibers terminating in the brain may be accompanied by the same sensations in all men, if the same objects happen not to produce the same motion in their brain, they consequently will not excite the same sensations in their soul . . . all men like pleasure, they all like pleasant sensations, and in this they all have the same inclination. Hence they do not all receive the same sensations from the same objects, since they do not like them equally . . . a sensation that is enjoyable to one person is enjoyable to everyone who feels it, but, on account of the different disposition of the sense organs, the same objects do not produce the sensation for everyone.⁴⁹

Because of such bodily disparities, human reactions and judgments varied enormously. Malebranche made no distinction between relativistic aesthetic reactions and what we would see as simpler physical ones, holding both due to nothing more than physiological variations in reception (though he did place a moral burden on taste). That he did not distinguish aesthetic reactions is important, for the negative significance, within *bon-nête* culture, of ascribing taste to physiology cannot be underestimated. Within this mindset, if people were to accept that taste was a meaningless or random function of brain fibers or animal spirits, its currency could easily be debased. This is surely why contemporary dictionaries were dissociating the two major senses of the word *goût*. Malebranche, seeking to diminish taste's mystique, made no such distinction. He moved seamlessly from discoursing on the impact of manly blows to an analysis of musical tastes as influenced by nationality or mood:

Now it seems to me beyond question that everyone's sense organs, not being disposed in the same way, cannot receive the same impressions from the same objects.

⁴⁸ Descartes, 40; cf. Poulain, 115. Cf. Stuurman's environmentalist read of this passage, 113–14.

⁴⁹ Malebranche, 64–65 (see 63–66).

The punches that porters give each other by way of compliment would cripple more delicate people. The same blow produces quite different motion and consequently quite different sensations in a man of robust constitution and in a child or a woman of delicate nature. Since there are no two people who can be guaranteed to have identical sense organs, it cannot be guaranteed that there are two people in this world having completely the same sensations of the same objects.

Here is the source of that vast variety found in men's inclinations. Some like music a great deal and others are indifferent to it. Even among those who enjoy it, some like one kind of music, others another, depending on the almost infinite variety found in the aural fibers, the blood, and the spirits. How much difference there is, for example, between the music of France and that of Italy and of China and of other lands, and as a result, between the taste these different peoples have for the different kinds of music. It even happens that one receives different impressions at different times from the same concerts. If your imagination is carried away by a great abundance of agitated spirits, you enjoy listening more to robust music that allows more dissonances than to more mellow music, which follows rules and mathematical precision more closely.⁵⁰

Long before Du Bos then, Malebranche was describing differences in national and regional taste and imagination in physiological terms, as caused by distinctions in air quality affecting "the various humors and mental characteristics of persons of different countries."⁵¹ Unlike contemporaries and later writers, he did not *rank* these different regional characteristics and tastes, which signified only alterations in air quality; all national tastes in this model were epiphenomenal and, therefore, although he did not specify or stress this, inherently faulty geographical expressions, insofar as they were simply mental judgments and predilections that reflected fluctuating bodily inputs with no relationship to the truth. Societal and individual differences of taste were necessarily, in this model, just varieties of sensual misapprehension; none was better than another.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 64.

⁵¹ Ibid., 95. Malebranche is not mentioned in the survey of interest in climate theory prior to Du Bos in A. Lombard, *L'abbé Du Bos* (Paris, 1913), 243–47.

THE GENDERED CRITIQUE

Malebranche did not emphasize the inherently arbitrary nature of national and regional tastes, an interesting logical lacuna testifying to his disinterest in emerging schemas that were ranking national tastes and presuming standards of taste generally, and that stands in great contrast with his gendered approach, giving insight into his real targets and concerns. For Malebranche placed a particularly negative emphasis on taste when speaking about the effeminate Parisian social elites and the women held to be France's taste experts. As he described, in a significant departure from Descartes, who had not gendered the love of beauty, the female body's influence explained women's superiority in taste, but also their inferiority in attentiveness, reason, and mental penetration.⁵² Launching his analysis of the imagination's general errors, Malebranche reminded his readers that "the delicacy of the brain fibers is one of the principal causes impeding our efforts to apply ourselves to discovering truths that are slightly hidden," and immediately proceeded to lay out the purview—matters of taste—of the delicate female brain.⁵³ In a series of rapid juxtapositions, as though the association of women and taste when speaking of the errors of the imagination were the most obvious example, he began his discussion of women's imagination as follows:

This delicacy of the brain fibers is usually found in women, and this is what gives them great understanding of everything that strikes the senses. It is for women to set fashions, judge language, discern elegance and good manners. They have more knowledge, skill, and finesse than men in these matters. Everything that depends upon taste is within their area of competence, but normally they are incapable of penetrating to truths that are slightly difficult to discover. Everything abstract is incomprehensible to them. They cannot use their imagination for working out complex and tangled questions. They consider only the surface of things, and their imagination has insufficient strength and reach to pierce through to the heart, comparing all the parts, without being distracted. A trifle is enough to distract them, the slightest cry frightens them, the least motion fascinates them. Finally, the style and not the reality of things suffices to occupy their minds to capacity; because

⁵² Descartes, 65.

⁵³ Malebranche, 130.

insignificant things produce great motions in the delicate fibers of their brains, these things necessarily excite great and vivid feelings in their souls, completely occupying it.⁵⁴

Malebranche thus acknowledged women's culturally recognized excellence in taste, but only in trivializing the property as a misleading, physiologically based capacity for superficial discrimination, linking it to a diminished ability on women's part to penetrate fully to the truth. Malebranche was not disagreeing with Poulain's claim that women, just as men, possessed reason, but for him, their delicate brain fibers and therefore natural predilection towards taste were a block to *exercising* this reason; too soft mental fibers meant minds "completely occup[ied]" "to capacity" with misleading sensual information, in constant turmoil due to heightened, ever-changing sensitive reception. Therefore, rational cognition could not occur. He carefully specified that "when we attribute certain defects to a sex, to certain ages, to certain stations, we mean only that it is ordinarily true, always assuming there is no general rule without exceptions"—some women might not have delicate brain fibers at all, and different combinations of brain fibers and animal spirit levels and activity could result in "strong, constant women . . . feeble, inconstant men"—but he concluded that "most women's and some men's [brain fibers] remain extremely delicate throughout their lives."⁵⁵ The damaging epistemological implications for most women are clear; they were incapable of the search after truth, of mental progress, perhaps even of salvation, so predicated for Malebranche upon reasoned repudiation of the sensual and erroneous, because of their brain and nervous fibers.⁵⁶ The whole project of the *Recherche*, to teach men how to avoid the errors of the senses, imagination, pure understanding, inclinations, and passions in order for reason to flourish en route to redemption, here appears closed to most women and directed only at a male audience who might learn the appropriate method to achieve truth.⁵⁷ These implications for women themselves do not appear to have troubled Malebranche, who took heart in the fact that tasteful women were not a particular danger to the search for truth because no one listened to them anyway; as he remarked, "Suffice it to say of women and children that since they are not involved in seeking truth and teaching others, their errors do

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 130–31. On universal reason (even in the Chinese), see 613–14.

⁵⁶ Cf. Stuurman, 96; James, 116.

⁵⁷ Malebranche, 17–18.

not sustain much prejudice, for one hardly takes their proposals seriously. Let us speak of grown men, whose minds are strong and vigorous, those one could believe capable of finding the truth and teaching it to others.”⁵⁸

Here there might be danger. Malebranche pursued his gendered critique, for if women via their normal mental delicacy were natural taste experts, men too could develop “effeminate” and “soft” minds and come to think in identical ways, with the same attention to superficial matters of taste and style, and the same inability to achieve focused attention and the use of their reason. “Most of the nobility, courtiers, rich people, the young, and those called *beaux-esprits*” were in this, like women, because of their constant indulgence in sensual pleasure. They

do not see the effects of even the crudest and most palpable causes. . . . they cannot either understand or penetrate anything, but they are extremely sensitive about manners and style. An ill-spoken phrase, a provincial accent, a small grimace irritates them infinitely more than a confused mass of bad arguments. They cannot recognize a mistake in an argument, but they are perfectly well aware of a false step or an ungainly gesture. . . . they have a perfect intelligence so far as sensible things are concerned, because they have made continual use of their senses; but they do not have true intelligence about things depending upon reason, because they have almost never used their own.⁵⁹

Such men had allowed their minds to soften by their chosen focus on the superficial; bloated with sensory knowledge—an avoidable condition, unlike most women’s natural state—reason became inaccessible to them too. It is this inability to judge the truth correctly that seems to have most irritated Malebranche, who clearly worried about the superficial judgments of an anti-pedantic salon society whose men and women were increasingly making the reputations of writers, and who could endow fame and fortune on a polite, well-dressed, well-connected speaker of whom “everything about him, even his collar and cuffs, will prove something,” but deny respect to a serious scholar, no matter how profound his thoughts, if he had a “dirty and ragged collar.”⁶⁰ Such false *beaux-esprits*, who cared if people lacked the requisite *honnête* and tasteful trappings, he mocked as mentally

⁵⁸ Ibid., 131; cf. 454, 542, 635; cf. Timmermans, 383.

⁵⁹ Malebranche, 155–56.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 80.

“soft” and “effeminate,” incapable of penetration to the truth, unlike serious, reasoning, penetrating men undistracted by feminine and superficial matters of taste. The true “fine minds,” he proclaimed, “are those who notice the slightest differences among things through the use of their reason alone. They predict effects that depend upon hidden, unusual, and invisible causes; in short, they are those who penetrate farthest into the subject they are considering.”⁶¹

This gendered psychology holds up weakly if analyzed on Malebranche’s own terms. We have seen his claim that aging, through long-term exposure to stimuli and by dint of the resulting dessicating animal spirits, hardened the nervous and brain fibers—thus the child became a reasonable adult—but he did not explain why, even if women’s brain matter were naturally softer, time did not harden it to the rigid, impermeable inflexibility of old age. In his model, it seems that mental maturation occurred only for men, for he did not distinguish between old and young women in speaking of the soft delicate female brain.⁶² He provided no forensic or logical evidence in support of his claims about women’s softer fibers, though he had proffered the partridge-flesh analogy as a logical buttress for his arguments about aging. In this he failed to respond to claims of anatomical brain similarities by Poulain, whom he did not cite, although he re-edited the *Recherche* during the period in which Poulain’s works became quite popular (in 1726 he was also posthumously criticized by Feijoo who questioned “these suppositions about the alleged softness”).⁶³ Finally, and most damagingly, since most women, and those “effeminate” men who allowed themselves to be swayed by their senses, experienced more sensory and imaginative stimulation and thus tremendous motion of the fibers and spirits, they should have more rapidly and easily achieved harder, drier, more penetrative fibers, according to his exposure/aging theory of vibrating fibers and spirits.⁶⁴ (For a *honnête* audience, should they have been able to move beyond distrust of bodily sensibility, this could well have explained what they saw as women’s and polished men’s superior, effortless and immediate penetration in matters of taste.⁶⁵)

Such noteworthy lapses in logic and evidence from such a brilliant

⁶¹ Ibid., 155.

⁶² Ibid., 131.

⁶³ Peruga, 392, 397–98; on Poulain’s reception, see Stuurman, 277ff.

⁶⁴ Malebranche, 49–50, 111.

⁶⁵ Cf. Katharine J. Hamerton, “An *Honnête* Feminist: Madame de Lambert and the Agency of the Enlightenment *Salonnière*” (paper presented at the 54th annual meeting of the Society for French Historical Studies, New Brunswick, N.J., 4 April 2008).

thinker who so carefully revised the *Recherche* over almost forty years remind us of the naturalizing work that science and philosophy can perform in the service of discursively maintaining gender distinctions. Clearly, traditional assumptions about gender difference could be retained and developed within Cartesianism, during this intense period of shifting models of gender, sex, and philosophy of mind.⁶⁶ This is not to deny the possibility of contestatory claims; Poulain was not the only seventeenth-century feminist who appropriated conventional ideas of female delicacy, either from *honnête* ideology or from the traditional medical model of the humors, to argue for women's mental *superiority*.⁶⁷ Malebranche's thought on soft, moist female brain and nervous tissue that failed to mature similarly reflected remnants of that model, and seeing women and children as physically and psychologically similar remained common long after: by the late eighteenth century, French moral anthropologists had developed a sophisticated physiological explanation for women's mental immaturity.⁶⁸

But Malebranche's obvious animus should be accounted for. His is a highly gendered, affect-laden commentary, scornful and disheartened, with angry comments about the powerful penetrative capacities of serious men cut down by socially superior effeminate.⁶⁹ His disclaimer that women could not seriously influence the search for truth was a wishful one, for it was when he focused on women and the soft effeminate minds of the male social elite received in their salons (not when he spoke of national and regional tastes) that he attacked the epistemological erroneousness of taste and its distracting from reason. Certainly, Malebranche found the errors made by learned and influential men far more dangerous than those of women; he also extensively attacked the deranged imaginations of certain authors.⁷⁰ But his heated language, lapses and strained arguments about women's taste and psychology and about effeminate men's judgments reveal his frustrations as a philosophical observer at a time when informally acquired taste was becoming enshrined as a necessary social accoutrement, elite women were wielding great literary influence, and writers were increasingly having to respond to the needs and growing purchasing power of a changing mixed-sex public that was an increasingly literate, critical,

⁶⁶ See Maclean, Laqueur, Stuurman.

⁶⁷ E.g., [C.M.D. Noël], *Les Avantages du sexe . . .* (Anvers, 1698), 88–94; Schiebinger, 167–69; OC, 1: 511, n. 225; Stuurman, 101.

⁶⁸ Vila, 246–48.

⁶⁹ Malebranche, 80–81, 155–56.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 131, 137–54, 157–60, 173–90, 454, 542.

consumerist, and needed audience.⁷¹ The disparaging zero-sum if-taste-then-no-reason arguments that focused on the feminized courtly and salon milieux by this Parisian scholar and Augustinian theologian—witness to developments in the Republic of Letters over the course of Louis XIV's reign—invite us to recall this cultural context.

Perhaps Malebranche's emphasis on interior sentiment (through God's grace) was instrumental in stimulating the emergence of modern aesthetic thought, as Becq asserts. But his physiological thought on the postlapsarian body must also be considered. (Certainly, he long predated Du Bos in physiologizing taste.) We cannot overlook his repeated emphasis on the absolute need to manage and restrain the imagination and the vitally useful but inherently misleading senses, and the gender implications of a management ability in which women were sorely lacking. As Lieselotte Steinbrügge has argued, speaking of writings on women of the 1770s, "the discovery that the sensory organs exert an influence over human knowledge is used to shape the argument that women are incapable of certain cognitive operations."⁷² This discovery did not require a century to flower, however, but exerted an immediate limiting effect, even within 1670s Cartesianism. With the mind debased by its union with the body, the case of Malebranche complicates any notion that Cartesianism's presumptively rigid separation of thought and matter necessarily carried with it benefit for women. It is true that for Malebranche, women possessed an unsexed reason, but Malebranche placed too much weight on the female body blocking most women from access to it for any feminist potential to have developed in his particular brand of Cartesianism. Occasionalism inadequately redeems Malebranche from this charge for he was clear, distinct, and detailed about the negative cognitive consequences of gendered biological matter in the form of soft feminine nervous and brain fibers, to the point of implying to his readers an inescapable physiological essentialism for women.⁷³ Unless God were to unbind mind from body, women would remain trapped: given that mind and body are currently bound by His will (and apparently will be for the duration), the negative epistemological impact of the soft female body is clear. In the end, whether one chooses to interpret this as causal or occa-

⁷¹ Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant* (Oxford, 1977), 149–52; Beasley; Timmermans; Viala, 132–37; Lougee; Suzanne Relyea, "Les Salonnieres et la difference de la protection," in *L'Age d'or du mécénat (1598–1661)*, ed. Roland Mousnier and Jean Mesnard (Paris, 1985), 295–303; DeJean; Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning* (New Haven, 1995), chap. 5.

⁷² Steinbrügge, 40; cf. 36.

⁷³ Cf. John W. Yolton, *Locke and French Materialism* (Oxford, 1991), 87, 109.

sional is irrelevant for women: effeminate, softened men could hope for personal alteration through constructive change of environment and activities; women could not. My concern has thus been to draw attention to Malebranche's negative physiological claims, applicable to fallen mankind but singling women out, for there this Cartesian's legacy to eighteenth-century gendered psychology and women truly lay.

THE LEGACY

The physiological gendering of sensibility, the commonplace that women were suited to the trivial realms of taste but not to reason, and the physiologization of taste itself, here traced back to Malebranche, Cartesian substance dualism, and an epistemology in which the senses interfered with true knowledge, would, after 1750, flourish in materialist and Vitalist critiques of women's taste, sensibility, and cognitive capacities, marginalizing women from an increasingly contentious public sphere.⁷⁴ Older assumptions reframed within Cartesianism, they stood at the origins of an eighteenth-century gendered materialism which would have far less to restrain its essentialist tendencies in the way of any purported mind-body split. Even in sensationalist epistemologies, women's sensibility would remain problematic. The mid- to late eighteenth century would see a heightened use of Malebranchian-style critiques deployed to deny women full access to the Enlightenment's search after truth and even serious aesthetic judgment (among other restrictions), relegating them to a trivialized taste. Since taste had, in large part, been their ticket into the polite seventeenth-century public sphere, Malebranche's influential contribution to this discourse was momentous for women.

If Neuvi   is representative, Malebranche's gendered physiology seems to have reached the average *litt  rateur* of the mid-eighteenth century, directly or through more diffuse channels. In his 1758 observations on the effects of the physical constitution on the mind, Neuvi   attributed mental differences to physical organization (age, sex, strength of fibers), and the "dominant humor" produced by "blood more or less fertile in animal spirits" as affected by climate, seasons, age, and food; limited "most women," just as Malebranche had done; and, tellingly, *even shared the example of*

⁷⁴ On Vitalism, see Vila; Sergio Moravia, "From *Homme Machine* to *Homme Sensible*: Changing Eighteenth-Century Models of Man's Image," *JHI* 39 (1978): 45–60; Peter Hanns Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley, 2005).

strong street porters contrasted with weaker women and children.⁷⁵ As he observed:

too weak organs cannot transmit to the soul the impression of objects, which is not profound enough for the mind to be able to conserve its ideas, attach itself to them, compare them and bring a judgment upon them. This is the disposition of children . . . this is also the constitution of most women whose fibers are commonly more delicate than those of man, and which a soft and sedentary life makes even more weak: they ordinarily have more vivacity and imagination than us, but they are struck only by perceptible objects, and they grasp only with difficulty abstract ideas, which demand reflection and reasoning, because the objects, succeeding one another with a surprising rapidity, mutually destroy each other. From this, the caprices, the inequalities, the inconstancy and the frivolity with which one reproaches them.⁷⁶

The Vitalist physician Le Camus, quoted above, who was noted for his work on sensibility by no less than Pierre Roussel (whose 1775 *Système physique et moral de la femme* was one of the best known Vitalist works limiting women because of their particular sexed sensibility), was a source for Neuillé in this work.⁷⁷ In this light, it bears mentioning that Le Camus's meliorative project on the human mind in his *Médecine de l'esprit* (1753), like Malebranche's in the *Recherche*, closed off, *only to women*, the possibility of mental perfectibility; for this later occasionalist (who was often perceived to be a materialist), the sexed limitations of sensibility were irrevocable in a way that is strikingly close to Malebranche.⁷⁸ Finally, Malebranche's impact on Rousseau is evident. Rousseau was an avid reader of Malebranche, and was the best known critic on feminine taste of these decades when women were again being aggressively charged with too much cultural influence. Long recognized in terms of the General Will, the love of order, the inherent sentiment in the human heart that draws us towards

⁷⁵ [Didier Pierre Chicaneau de Neuillé], *Considérations sur les ouvrages d'esprit* (Amsterdam, 1758), 116–20ff.; cf. 116 (*un porte-faix nerveux*) with Malebranche, 64 (*les portefaix*).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 117–19. Cf. Vila, chap. 7, e.g., 246, 249, 252; Steinbrügge, chap. 3, e.g., 35, 37, 38.

⁷⁷ Vila, 325, n. 11; see Vila and Steinbrügge on Roussel; Neuillé, *Considérations*, 141.

⁷⁸ Le Camus, 2: 208–9; on perceptions of Le Camus as a materialist, see Yolton, e.g., 68, 87, 109.

the good and which for Malebranche was a function of God's grace but which was naturalized in Rousseau (much of this developed in the ideas of the Savoyard vicar), this influence seems present too, I would contend, in Rousseau's presumption of all-encompassing, fixed cognitive and psychological differences derived from biological sex, in his views on feminine taste, and in his thought on women's feminizing and trivializing influence on French taste and on men's creative and intellectual productions and judgments.⁷⁹ Rousseau was not alone in these decades in espousing a physiological gender essentialism some elements of which should be traced back to Malebranche, but it does seem that he may have become, as far as women are concerned, one of his greatest legacies.

Ironies abound. Malebranche's moral critique of taste *tout court* was ineffective in his day in undermining its elite status and disabusing the French public of the importance of a property to which they long remained attached—to possess taste, due to the gentle polishing of society women, would become a trope of the Enlightenment *philosophe*, much to Rousseau's chagrin.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, he undermined women's taste to such a degree that he was still informing debates over the gendered nature of French national taste in the pre-revolutionary decades. Malebranche's occasionalism was, after 1750, enjoying renewed popularity as a rival to Locke's suggestion of thinking matter in France,⁸¹ yet it seems that many eighteenth-century writers who may or may not have been interested in occasionalist niceties had no qualms about latching onto his physiological notions of feminine taste and cognitive abilities in a straightforwardly causal manner. In all events there was significant confusion about occasionalism, correlation and causality in this period; many who called themselves occasionalists, like Le Camus (or Condillac) were easily read as materialist thinkers; new physiological research was modifying occasionalism in the direction of physical influence; and there was a growing belief at this time that, medically speaking, distinguishing mind and body was useless.⁸² As James has commented, of Descartes, "it is not hard to imagine that a less metaphysi-

⁷⁹ Émile Brehier, "Les lectures Malebranchistes de J.-J. Rousseau," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 1 (1938): 98–120; Alberto Postigliola, "De Malebranche à Rousseau: Les apories de la volonté générale et la revanche du raisonneur violent," *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 39 (1972–77): 123–38 (see references, 126, n. 1); Patrick Riley, "The General Will Before Rousseau," *Political Theory* 6 (1978): 485–516.

⁸⁰ But see Elena Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 2007), on the shift away from this model.

⁸¹ Yolton, 5, 7–8 and passim.

⁸² Yolton, 109; 68, 72–73, 87, 109; 101–2; Vila, 82. See Yolton, passim.

cally rigorous defender of the Cartesian view of the soul,” or, we might add in Malebranche’s case, a less rigorous student of occasionalism, “might conclude that the body thinks,” and that some bodies think in certain highly gendered and misleading ways.⁸³ For some, Malebranche’s physiological thought led directly there, as when the anonymous author of the clandestine *L’Ame matérielle* “transform[ed] this physiology into a frank materialism.”⁸⁴ “Malebranche,” it has been noted, “would have been horrified by such a progeny.”⁸⁵ But at least he could have appreciated, as we have not, this progeny’s faithfulness to his limiting views on women’s cognitive capacities and tastes.

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⁸³ James, 106.

⁸⁴ Alain Niderst, ed., *L’Ame matérielle* (Paris, 1969), 13; see Yolton, 57.

⁸⁵ Richard Acworth, “Malebranche and his Heirs,” *JHI* 38 (1977): 674.

Banishing Fortuna: Montmort and De Moivre

David Bellhouse

INTRODUCTION

In the first two decades of the eighteenth century there was a flowering of publications in probability theory: Pierre Rémond de Montmort's *Essay d'analyse sur les jeux de hazard* in 1708¹ followed by a second edition in 1713,² Jacob Bernouilli's posthumous work *Ars Conjectandi* in 1713,³ and finally Abraham De Moivre's *De Mensura Sortis* in 1711,⁴ which he enlarged into *The Doctrine of Chances* in 1718.⁵ There were some similarities between Montmort's and De Moivre's work. Both pursued similar problems and covered similar mathematical ground, albeit in different ways. Despite the differences, Montmort accused De Moivre of imitating his work and there were disputes over priority of discovery in the results they obtained. Both the 1708 and 1713 editions of the *Essay d'analyse* contain an engraving that shows allegorically Montmort defeating superstitions about

¹ Pierre Rémond de Montmort, *Essay d'analyse sur les jeux de hazard* (Paris: J. Quillau, 1708).

² Pierre Rémond de Montmort, *Essay d'analyse sur les jeux de hazard* (2nd ed., Paris: J. Quillau, 1713; New York: Chelsea, 1980).

³ Jakob Bernoulli, *Ars Conjectandi* (Basel: Thurnisius Fratrum 1713).

⁴ Abraham De Moivre, "De Mensura Sortis seu; de probabilitate eventuum in ludis a casu fortuito pendentibus," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 27 (1711): 213–64. Translated in Anders Hald, "A. de Moivre: 'De Mensura Sortis' or 'On the Measurement of Chance,'" *International Statistical Review* 52 (1984): 229–62.

⁵ Abraham De Moivre, *The Doctrine of Chances, or, a Method of Calculating the Probability of Events in Play* (London: Pearson, 1718).

chance through mathematics. It was in the second edition of 1713 that De Moivre was heavily criticized. De Moivre responded with his own engraving in *The Doctrine of Chances* that showed mathematics taming chance. This engraving had a second message embedded in it. Put simply, De Moivre claimed pictorially that his solutions were better than Montmort's and so he had done much more to banish the goddess of fortune than Montmort. The engravings are discussed in the context of the priority dispute as well as in the context of the contemporary literature on the rules of games.

Montmort⁶ was a French aristocrat; De Moivre⁷ was a Huguenot émigré living in England following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Montmort received a substantial inheritance from his father, François Rémond, Sieur de Breviande which allowed the son to purchase Chateau Montmort and to pursue mathematical questions at his leisure. Prior to De Moivre fleeing France, his father provided him with a solid education in both mathematics and the classics, which allowed the son to operate as a tutor to the children of the titled and the wealthy in London. He pursued mathematical questions between lessons and in the evenings.

Both Montmort's and De Moivre's works in probability used games of chance as a model. Gambling and games of chance were ubiquitous throughout both French and English societies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is, however, the upper levels of society to which these two mathematicians' publications apply, mainly the *second état* in France and the nobility, gentry, and wealthy merchants in England. The engravings in Montmort's two editions show scenes of what appear to be people engaged in courtly games of chance. As recounted in the dedicatory preface to *De Mensura Sortis*, De Moivre's work was inspired by mathematical questions on games put to the author by Francis Robartes, a younger son of the first Earl of Radnor.

Louis XIV set the tone for gambling among the French nobility. Games of chance were played at all the royal chateaux and stakes were often very high. Thomas Kavanagh⁸ argues that in France "high-stakes gambling was

⁶ Bernard de Fontenelle, "Eloge de M. de Montmort," *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences—Année 1719* (1720): 83–93.

⁷ Matthew Maty, "Mémoire sur la vie & sur les écrits de Mr. de Moivre," *Journal britannique* 18 (1755): 1–51. A translation and further biographical information on De Moivre can be found in David Bellhouse and Christian Genest, "Maty's biography of Abraham De Moivre, Translated, Annotated and Augmented," *Statistical Science* 22 (2007): 109–36.

⁸ Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 42.

an important symbolic activity for a nobility obliged to affirm its prestige and its independence of any limiting financial considerations.” At Versailles Louis played at least three times a week at his *appartements du roi*. His second wife, Madame de Maintenon, his brother Philippe duc d’Orléans, called Monsieur, and his grandson Louis duc de Bourgogne all organized games at court as well. Often Louis paid their gambling debts.⁹ In Paris gambling establishments were readily available. There were ten authorized gambling houses where games of mixed chance and skill were allowed and where games of pure chance were played on the sly. There were also fairs that operated for about four months of the year where there were opportunities to gamble. Foreign embassies also operated gambling houses within their precincts.¹⁰

Games of chance in England had been outlawed during the Commonwealth period but were restored at the Restoration. Charles II opened Christmas festivities with dice games¹¹ and also reinstated the office of Groom Porter.¹² One of the responsibilities of this court officer was to provide tables and chairs as well as cards and dice in his apartment at court where games of chance could be played. The Groom Porter also had the authority to license gaming houses, originally only within London.¹³ The wealthy also played games of chance in private houses as well as in the assembly rooms at the popular spa towns of Bath and Tunbridge Wells. By the early eighteenth century play in private houses had been sufficiently abused that the Groom Porter was given authority in 1705 to license all games of chance played within the kingdom.¹⁴ The Groom Porter at the time, Thomas Archer, later subscribed to De Moivre’s *Miscellanea Analytica*,¹⁵ a high-level mathematics treatise that dealt in part with the mathematics of probability.

Gambling and games of chance stimulated at least three types of litera-

⁹ Olivier Grussi, *La Vie quotidienne des joueurs sous l’ancien régime à Paris et à la cour* (Paris: Hachette, 1985), 62.

¹⁰ *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance*, 30–32.

¹¹ John Ashton, *The History of Gambling in England* (1898, repr., Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1969), 47.

¹² David Miers, *Regulating Commercial Gambling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24.

¹³ R.O. Bucholz, “The Database of Court Officers 1660–1837,” Chamber List 5, Department of History, Loyola University of Chicago, <http://www.luc.edu/history/bucholz/DCO/index.html> (accessed July 12, 2006).

¹⁴ Ashton, *History of Gambling*, 48.

¹⁵ Abraham De Moivre, *Miscellanea Analytica de Seriebus et Quadraturis* (London: J. Tonson and J. Watts, 1730).

ture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: moral tracts that almost invariably condemned gambling, rulebooks that provided descriptions of how the games were played, and mathematical analyses of the games in play. Only the latter two are of relevance here.

The mathematical literature on the theory of probability is usually traced to correspondence between Blaise Pascal and Pierre de Fermat in 1654 that concerned two gambling problems suggested by Antoine Gambaud, chevalier de Méré.¹⁶ One problem was to calculate the chances in certain throws of the dice and the other was concerned with the division of stakes in a game of chance when the game is concluded partway through. Christiaan Huygens was in Paris in 1655 and had heard of Pascal and Fermat's solutions, but was unaware of the methods they had used. When he returned home to Holland, he solved the problems himself. The next year he wrote a small treatise in Dutch describing his solutions. The treatise was submitted to the mathematician Frans van Schooten, who translated it into Latin and published it as part of a larger publication of mathematical exercises.¹⁷ The treatise *De Ratiociniis in Ludo Aleae* is considered to be the earliest printed work in probability theory. It stimulated some of the work appearing in *Essay d'analyse* and *De Mensura Sortis*.

Huygens's treatise contains a challenge problem that came to be known as the gambler's ruin problem. The problem may be described as follows. When two people are playing a series of games, each initially holding different capital, what is the probability that a particular player is ruined or loses all his capital? Related to gambler's ruin is another called the problem of the duration of play. Here the question is: what is the probability that the ruin of either player occurs within a given number of games? These problems turn out to be one of the keys to understanding the dispute between Montmort and De Moivre, and especially the engraving in *The Doctrine of Chances*. Both men found solutions using different mathematical approaches. At the time, De Moivre considered one of his solutions to the duration of play to be the crowning achievement of his work in probability.¹⁸ Anders Hald has a modern discussion of the various eighteenth-century solutions to these problems.¹⁹

¹⁶ F. N. David, *Gods, Games and Gambling: A History of Probability and Statistical Ideas* (London: Charles Griffin, 1962), 70–97, 229–53.

¹⁷ Christiaan Huygens, "De Ratiociniis in Ludo Aleae," in Frans van Schooten, ed., *Exercitationum mathematicarum libri quinque* (Leiden: Elsevier, 1657), 517–34.

¹⁸ Maty, "Mémoire de Mr. de Moivre," 26–27.

¹⁹ Anders Hald, *A History of Probability and Statistics and Their Applications Before 1750* (New York: Wiley, 1990), 347–74.

Rulebooks describing several different games started appearing at approximately the same time as Huygens's mathematical analysis. The *Maison académique*, possibly the earliest French publication of this type, first appeared in 1654.²⁰ It was given the *privilège du roi*, a form of copyright, so that its contents were considered new and unique. An expanded edition came out in 1659, also under the *privilège du roi*.²¹ This book, of which Christiaan Huygens owned a copy,²² contains rules for the popular card game piquet, as well as rules for other card games, rules for the board game trictrac and rules for billiards. Both editions, dedicated to Monsieur, come with frontispieces. The engraving in Figure 1²³ is from the 1659 edition. Of interest here are the people playing games in the room that opens out onto a courtyard. At the table on the right side of the room are two gentlemen playing at cards. Behind them are another two playing billiards. At the table on the left there is a gentleman with a chessboard. At the end of the table are two more gentlemen playing dice. Later French rulebooks were typically published under the name *Académie universelle des jeux*, first published in 1718.²⁴

The English version of rulebooks for games is *The Compleat Gamester*, first published in 1674.²⁵ It also contains descriptions of the card game piquet, called picket in the book, as well as other card and dice games played in England including a game called tick-tack which is similar to, but not the same as, trictrac. Unlike its French counterpart, *The Compleat Gamester* has descriptions of bowling, horseracing, cockfighting, and archery. It also includes advice on how to detect cheating at cards and dice. There were several editions of *The Compleat Gamester* throughout the rest of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century. It was then in-

²⁰ La Marinière, *La Maison académique contenant un recueil général de tous les jeux divertissans pour se rejouyr agréablement dans les bonnes compagnies, par le sieur D.L.M.* (Paris: R. de Nain et M. Leché, 1654).

²¹ La Marinière, *La Maison académique* (Paris: Estienne Loyson, 1659).

²² "Catalogue de la vente des livres de Chr. Huygens," in *Oeuvres complètes de Christiaan Huygens publiée par la Société hollandaise des sciences. Tome vingt-deuxième* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), 55.

²³ Reproduced with permission from the White Collection of the Cleveland Public Library.

²⁴ *Académie Universelle des Jeux: contenant les regles des jeux de cartes permis, du trictrac, des echecs, de la paulme, du mail, du billard, & autres; avec des instructions faciles pour apprendre a les bien jouer* (Paris: Le Gras, 1718).

²⁵ Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester: or, Instructions How to Play at Billiards, Trucks, Bowls, and Chess Together with All Manner of Usual and Most Gentile Games Either on Cards or Dice* (London: Henry Brome, 1674).



FIGURE 1: Engraving from *Maison académique*.

corporated into another publication entitled *The Court Gamester* that went through several editions.²⁶

Prior to Montmort and De Moivre there were some attempts to subject games then being played to mathematical analyses. Joseph Sauveur, a French mathematician, analyzed the popular card game Bassette to find what advantage there was to the banker.²⁷ Both Montmort and De Moivre considered the same problem.²⁸ John Arbuthnot, a Scottish physician who resided in London, translated Huygens's treatise into English.²⁹ At the end of his translation, he presented applications of the mathematical results to games such as raffling and whist.

Other mathematicians pursued general probability problems using games of chance as a model. Francis Robartes dabbled in probability theory in the 1690s. He was not a great probabilist, publishing one paper in 1693 on a perceived paradox in a lottery³⁰ that Isaac Todhunter summed up as a "paradox . . . made by Roberts [Robartes] himself, by his own arbitrary definition of *odds*."³¹ Earlier in 1691 Robartes had presented another paper on probability to the Royal Society; the paper was not published.³² This paper contains correct solutions to two problems. One had been solved earlier by Huygens and the other was a variation on a problem posed by Jakob Bernoulli in 1685 and solved by him in 1690.³³

MONTMORT'S ESSAY D'ANALYSE SUR LES JEUX DE HAZARD 1708

In *De Ratiociniis* Huygens solved probability problems related to games of chance without mentioning any specific games. By contrast, in the first edi-

²⁶ Richard Seymour, *The Court Gamester: or, Full and Easy Instructions for Playing the Games Now in Vogue, after the Best Method; as They are Play'd at Court and in the Assemblies* (London: E. Curll, 1719).

²⁷ Joseph Sauveur, "Supputation des avantages du banquier dans le jeu de la Bassette," *Journal des Sçavans* (1679): 38–45.

²⁸ Montmort, *Essay d'analyse*, 65–74 and De Moivre, *Doctrine of Chances*, 32–39.

²⁹ John Arbuthnot, *Of the Laws of Chance, or a Method of Calculation of the Hazards of Game, Plainly Demonstrated* (London: Benjamin Motte, 1692).

³⁰ Francis Roberts (*sic*), "An Arithmetical Paradox, concerning the Chances of Lotteries," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 17 (1693): 677–81.

³¹ Isaac Todhunter, *A History of the Mathematical Theory of Probability from the Time of Pascal to that of Laplace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1865; New York: Chelsea, 1965), 54.

³² Classified Papers 1660–1741, Cl.P.I.4, Royal Society Archives, London, England.

³³ Jakob Bernoulli, "Problème proposé par M. Bernoulli," *Journal des Sçavans* (1685): 314 and Jakob Bernoulli, "Quaestiones nonnullae de usuris, cum solutione problematica de sorte alearum," *Acta Eruditorum* (1690), 219–23. The problem and solution are described in modern notation in Hald, *History of Probability and Statistics*, 184–85.

tion of *Essay d'analyse* Montmort analyzed a number of contemporary card and dice games, each game analyzed in turn. The mathematical methods that were used went well beyond what had been done previously in probability theory. In terms of the subject matter, at first glance the book appears to be written with gamblers in mind. This was noted by an anonymous reviewer of the book.³⁴ Indeed, Montmort only went a little beyond specific games of chance. He left it to the last section of the book to solve the five challenge problems set in *De Ratiociniis*. Then he solved a special case of the problem of the duration of play and followed it with four of his own challenge problems that he left unsolved.

Montmort states his reason for writing the *Essay d'analyse* in his preface. Thomas Kavanagh interprets Montmort's reason very succinctly, writing, "Montmort explains that his careful scrutiny of so apparently frivolous a subject as the intricacies of popular card games carries with it the serious advantage of allowing him to vanquish, on its home ground, that most decried of all Enlightenment evils: superstition."³⁵ The subject matter may have been frivolous. It was, however, an activity central to the court of Louis XIV.

Within a year of its publication, Montmort sent copies of *Essay d'analyse* to some English mathematicians. Surviving covering letters for the book include one to Isaac Newton³⁶ and another to William Jones.³⁷ Montmort may also have included Francis Robartes on his distribution list. No covering letter is extant and the evidence is circumstantial. In a letter written in 1712 to Johann Bernoulli, De Moivre says that the gentleman who encouraged him to work on probability (Francis Robartes) had done so while speaking of Montmort's book.³⁸

One of the many problems that Montmort solved was a special case of the problem of the duration of play.³⁹ The solution is given in some remarks that follow from a problem dealing with an event happening within a certain number of trials. The special case is that the capital of each player is at

³⁴ Review of *Essay d'analyse sur les jeux de hazard*, by Pierre Rémond de Montmort, *Supplément du Journal des Sçavans* (1709): 462.

³⁵ Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance*, 12.

³⁶ Isaac Newton, *The Correspondence of Isaac Newton*, ed. J. F. Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 4: 533–54.

³⁷ Stephen Jordan Rigaud, ed., *Correspondence of Scientific Men of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: University Press, 1841; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965), 2: 256.

³⁸ Karl Wollenschläger, "Der mathematische Briefwechsel zwischen Johann I Bernoulli und Abraham de Moivre," *Verhandlungen der Naturforschenden Gesellschaft in Basel* 43 (1933): 151–317.

³⁹ Montmort, *Essay d'analyse*, 184–85.

most three units and the players are of equal skill. Montmort felt, incorrectly it turns out, that the formula he had obtained could, with little effort, be extended to obtain the general solution. The reviewer of *Essay d'analyse* wrote that he would have liked Montmort to have spared other mathematicians' efforts by providing the general solution.⁴⁰

Essay d'analyse contains engravings executed by Sébastien Le Clerc. By the time of the publication of the book, Le Clerc had already revolutionized the art of book illustration.⁴¹ Le Clerc did the engravings for many scientific works including publications of the French Académie des sciences; he also published his own books in geometry and architecture. Montmort had commissioned an able mathematician and probably France's leading engraver to illustrate his book.

It is the first engraving in *Essay d'analyse*, shown in Figure 2,⁴² which is of interest. Placed at the head of the preface of the *Essay*, it is an allegorical illustration of the importance that Montmort attached to the results given in his book. The engraving also illustrates the continuity the *Essay* shared with the earlier rulebooks produced in France, particularly *Maison académique*. There are some striking similarities between the engraving in *Essay d'analyse* (Figure 2) and the frontispiece to *Maison académique* (Figure 1). Both are probably situated at royal chateaux. Within the games room in both engravings, there are people playing at cards, dice and billiards. There are also chessboards in both engravings.

The scene in the engraving in *Essay d'analyse* is first and foremost an allegory. The foreground is divided into three parts and the outermost figures in it are ancient gods and goddesses. These were identified in the eighteenth century in a catalogue of Le Clerc's engravings.⁴³ On the left of the engraving, Athena, the goddess of wisdom and skills, is seated at a square table talking to a man. She is identified by the classical robes and helmet she is wearing. On the right, Hermes, the messenger of the gods, is seated with a man and a woman at a round table. He is identified by the caduceus that he is holding on his left arm. What is new here is the interpretation of the scene.

⁴⁰ Review of *Essay d'analyse*, 464.

⁴¹ E.C. Watson, "The early days of the Académie des sciences as portrayed in the engravings of Sébastien Le Clerc," *Osiris* 7 (1939): 556–87.

⁴² Reproduced with permission from the collection of Professor Stephen Stigler, University of Chicago.

⁴³ Charles-Antoine Jombert, 1774, *Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre de Sébastien le Clerc, Seconde Partie* (Paris: Chez l'Auteur, Libraire du Roi pour l'Artillerie & Génie, 1774), 246–49.



FIGURE 2: Engraving introducing the Preface of *Essay d'analyse des jeux de hazard*.

Tyche or Fortuna, the goddess of fortune, does not appear in the picture although Montmort refers to her in the preface, writing, “They [superstitious gamblers] believe that it is necessary to appease this blind divinity that one calls Fortune, in order to force her to be favourable to them in following the rules which they have imagined. I think therefore it would be useful, not only to gamesters but to all men in general, to know that chance has rules that can be known. . . .”⁴⁴ Appeasing Fortuna is no longer necessary and she has been banished from the scene.

On the round table on the right of Figure 2 there are three coins and two dice; the man at the table is pointing to the three coins. From the hand gestures of both the man and the woman, the thrown dice have just come to rest and have revealed their outcome; the man has won. Hermes is announcing the man’s win and taking credit for it as a gift of the gods. Hermes was also the giver of good luck and the god that presided over dice games.⁴⁵ Hermes’ perceived hold over dice games is soon to end; he is seated at the table rather than standing over the couple in a dominant posture.

On the left, Montmort is the man standing at the table talking to Athena. On the table are mathematical instruments showing Athena’s wisdom related to mathematics. He is instructing her on his new mathematical discoveries about chance; the page he is showing to her contains a mathematical formula. Montmort appears in a dominant posture over Athena. In addition, Athena is copying down what Montmort is showing her. These all indicate that fate or fickle fortune, that were thought to be under the control of the gods, are subject to regular mathematical laws.

The monkey in the middle of the scene is pointing to a chess board. Monkeys appear as part of various descriptions of emblems in several editions of Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia*.⁴⁶ The 1644 French edition has the monkey make its appearance in only one place. Under the entry “Académie,” the monkey is described as a mystical figure associated with learning and knowledge among the Egyptians. The Egyptians dedicated the monkey to Hermes.⁴⁷ Another interpretation elsewhere, but also originating from Ripa, is that the monkey is “the most perfect imitator of human actions.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Trans. in Florence N. David, *Games, Gods and Gambling* (London: Griffen, 1962), 144.

⁴⁵ William Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (London: J. Walton, 1867), 413.

⁴⁶ Yassu Okayama, *The Ripa Index: Personifications and their Attributes in Five Editions of the Iconologia* (Davaco: Doornspijk, 1992).

⁴⁷ Cesare Ripa, *Iconologie*, trans. Jean Baudouin (Paris: Mathieu Guillemot, 1644; New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1976), 7.

⁴⁸ George Richardson, *Iconology, Volume First* (London: G. Scott), 80.

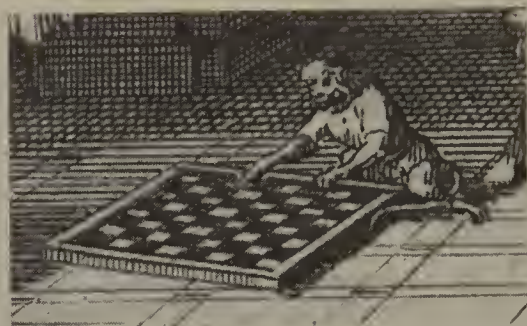


FIGURE 3: Enlargement of the Monkey.

My interpretation of the engraving in the *Essay d'analyse* is that the monkey embodies both interpretations from Ripa. Similar to Montmort in the engraving, the monkey has outstretched arms and is slightly bent over. The monkey is pointing to a chess board symbolizing Montmort's new creation of knowledge with respect to courtly games. There is a further interpretation of the role of the monkey that I would put forward. An enlargement of the monkey is shown in Figure 3. The position of the monkey's hands shows a knight's move on the chessboard; the left hand is pointing to a bishop's initial position. Montmort had been a canon in the Church, left the position to get married and then in 1708 was created Baron de St-Mard.⁴⁹ There could be two interpretations to the monkey's hand position depending on the timing of the printing of the engraving. If the engraving was made prior to his becoming a baron, then the monkey motif is a request to King Louis XIV to ennoble Montmort for his important discoveries into chance events. This also helps to explain why Montmort devoted so much of his treatise to courtly games of chance in the first edition of the *Essay d'analyse*. If, on the other hand, the engraving was made after he was made a baron, then the monkey is further identifying the man talking to the goddess of wisdom as Montmort.

DE MOIVRE'S *DE MENSURA SORTIS* 1711

Francis Robartes, who had been working on probability problems since the 1690s, brought one to De Moivre for which Robartes had a laborious solution. It was a problem posed in a lawn bowling scenario in which two players, called A and B are equally matched and have an equal number of

⁴⁹ Henri Jouglar de Morenas, *Grand armorial de France, Tome 5* (Paris: Société de grand armorial de France, 1948).

balls each. The game is to be played until one side has a certain number of points. A point is obtained for each ball that a player has closest to the jack. In the problem posed, A is one point shy of winning and B is two. The next day, De Moivre found a very simple solution. Robartes then posed two more problems and encouraged De Moivre to write on probability. During a holiday that he took at a country house, De Moivre finished his manuscript on probability and then submitted it to the Royal Society. The treatise, in Latin and dedicated to Robartes, has the title *De Mensura Sortis* or the measurement of chance (or, more literally, lots). The initial problem posed by Robartes appears as Problem 16 in the treatise. *De Mensura Sortis* has the flavor of a strictly mathematical treatise, solving difficult problems modelled generally on games of chance. Unlike Montmort, there is no description of any game of chance played at the time and no discussion of Fortuna and the superstitions surrounding her.

De Mensura Sortis contains solutions to problems that are similar to what appears in the 1708 edition of *Essay d'analyse*. For example, solutions were given to the five challenge problems that appear in *De Ratiociniis*; Huygens's Problem V, the gambler's ruin problem is De Moivre's Problem 9. De Moivre also gave a general statement of the gambler's ruin problem and obtained a solution. He also tackled the duration of play problem and gave an algorithm to find a general solution to the ruin probability of one of the players. The algorithm is simple but the amount of calculation required is enormous. The algorithm is described succinctly by Anders Hald.⁵⁰ There were also new problems with new solutions, the problem set by Robartes, for example, and another known today as Waldegrave's problem. In the latter problem, there are three people in the game each putting initially one unit into the pool or pot. Two of the people play against each other with the loser paying one unit into the pot. The winner plays the person sitting out. Play continues in like fashion until one person has beaten the other two in succession. The problem is to find the probability of winning for each person as well as that person's expected winnings.

It is likely that De Moivre continued to work on probability problems soon after the publication of *De Mensura Sortis*. Unfortunately, De Moivre's papers appear not to have survived and there is very little correspondence of his that has survived. The only evidence is from a poem by the writer and philosopher André François Deslandes.⁵¹ Deslandes had studied

⁵⁰ Hald, *History of Probability and Statistics*.

⁵¹ André François Deslandes, *Poetae Rustiantis Literatum Otium* (2nd ed., London: Linnett, 1713).

mathematics under Jacques Ozanam at the Académie des sciences de Paris in 1712. During a visit to London in 1713 as part of the French delegation negotiating peace to end the War of Spanish Succession, he met De Moivre along with several other mathematicians.⁵² The poem was written while he was in London. In it Deslandes calls De Moivre the “New Euclid” to whom Nature had revealed her mysterious secrets. Although he never specifies the subject material, Deslandes encourages De Moivre to share his knowledge and to publish his work.

MONTMORT’S *ESSAY D’ANALYSE SUR LES JEUX DE HAZARD* 1713

The second edition of Montmort’s *Essay d’analyse* has five sections comprising expanded versions of the first four sections from the first edition and a new fifth section. The new section contains correspondence on probability problems exchanged between Montmort and Nicolaus Bernoulli over the years 1710 though 1713. There is no new engraving that accompanies the new section.

Shortly after the publication of *De Mensura Sortis* in mid-1712, De Moivre sent “reprints” of his paper to several people including Montmort.⁵³ From Montmort’s point of view, De Moivre started off *De Mensura Sortis* very badly. De Moivre had written in his preface to that work:

Huygens was the first that I know who presented rules for the solution of this sort of problems, which a French author has very recently well illustrated with various examples; but these distinguished gentlemen do not seem to have employed that simplicity and generality which the nature of the matter demands: moreover, while they take up many unknown quantities, to represent the various conditions of gamesters, they make their calculations too complex; and while they suppose that the skill of gamesters is always equal, they confine this doctrine of games within limits too narrow.⁵⁴

⁵² André François Deslandes, *Histoire critique de la philosophie: ou l’on traite de son origine, de ses progrès, & des diverses révolutions qui lui sont arrivées jusqu’à notre tems* (Amsterdam: Changuion, 1756), 2: 264–65.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

⁵⁴ De Moivre, trans. Hald, 237.

In his *Avertissement* to *Essay d'analyse*, Montmort quotes this section in its entirety in the original Latin. He then launches into his defense. He states that he had given general solutions when the problem posed warranted it. He did not understand the comment about taking up unknown quantities since almost all of his solutions used combinatorial methods. Further, he did not see the necessity of treating the case of unequal skills between gamblers. It would be impossible to quantify these skills *a priori* and, moreover, if the situation of unequal skills were required it would be a simple task to generalize the results that Montmort had already obtained. Montmort concludes by giving De Moivre a little lecture on the history of probability beginning with Pascal and Fermat.

One of the letters published in the new fifth section of *Essay d'analyse* is also relevant to the dispute. Dated September 5, 1712 it was from Montmort to Bernoulli. Most of the letter is a discussion and critique of De Moivre's *De Mensura Sortis* which Montmort had received about a month before.⁵⁵ For the most part, Montmort felt that there was nothing new in De Moivre's work. The results had either appeared in Montmort's first edition or had been obtained already in his earlier correspondence with Bernoulli. Montmort did acknowledge that there were a few new and interesting results in De Moivre's work. For example, Montmort found De Moivre's solution to the ruin probability for one of the players of great interest and acknowledged the generality of its solution. He also noted its drawback in the amount of computation required and stated that the formula he and Bernoulli had obtained and published in the second edition of the *Essay d'analyse* was easier to use.

There are no letters extant from De Moivre that show his reaction to Montmort's second edition of *Essay d'analyse*. It is safe to assume that De Moivre was stung by some of the criticisms. By mid-decade the two were corresponding with one another and appear to have smoothed things over. In a letter from Montmort to Brook Taylor, dated January 2, 1715, Montmort expressed concern for De Moivre over some illness from which De Moivre was suffering.⁵⁶ Montmort had also heard that De Moivre was planning a second edition of his work on probability, this time to be published in English, and expressed his desire for it to be published in Latin so that it would be more widely read. The two met in 1715 when Montmort visited London to view a solar eclipse. The relationship was cordial and

⁵⁵ Montmort, *Essay d'analyse*, 362–69.

⁵⁶ *Contemplatio Philosophica: A Posthumous Work of the Late Brook Taylor* LLD FRS. London: Bulmer, 1793), 92.

Matthew Maty reports: "He [Montmort] found in Mr. De Moivre a fellow countryman eager to extend to him all the courtesies of friendship, and so, when he returned to France, he wrote to him and thanked him for his hospitality."⁵⁷ At some time during this period, Montmort sent De Moivre ten theorems on probability that he felt could be included in De Moivre's next edition. By 1716, however, Montmort was concerned about their scientific relationship and especially the status of his ten theorems. On April 12, 1716, Montmort wrote to Brook Taylor expressing concern that De Moivre had not written to him for some time, although Montmort had written De Moivre twice after his visit to England. Montmort asked Taylor to look into the matter discreetly, saying that he liked De Moivre and thought he was a good man.⁵⁸

DE MOIVRE'S *THE DOCTRINE OF CHANCES* 1718

On the surface the relationship between De Moivre and Montmort was collegial, even friendly. In 1711 De Moivre had solved the lawn bowling problem posed by Robartes in which the players had equal skill. De Moivre had noted in a corollary that the solution could be generalized to include players of unequal skill or chances to win a point. In his second edition of *Essay d'analyse* Montmort had used another approach to solve the problem with players of unequal skill. In *The Doctrine of Chances* De Moivre compliments Montmort on his solution saying: "I very willingly acknowledge his Solution to be extreamly good, and own that he has in this, as well as in a great many other things, shewn himself entirely master of the doctrine of Combinations, which he has employed with very great Industry and Sagacity."⁵⁹ Later in *The Doctrine of Chances* De Moivre quotes one of the theorems sent to him by Montmort and refers to it as "elegant."⁶⁰

De Moivre stood his ground on another matter. In the preface to *De Mensura Sortis* he had claimed that his solutions had the benefit of simplicity and generality over previous work. He continues with the same theme in the preface to *The Doctrine of Chances*, although in this case with a specific problem regarding random permutations of an ordered sequence of

⁵⁷ "Mémoire de Mr. de Moivre," trans. Bellhouse and Genest.

⁵⁸ Montmort, *Contemplatio Philosophica*, 93.

⁵⁹ De Moivre *Doctrine of Chances*, 70.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

letters that Montmort and Bernoulli had solved in the 1713 *Essay d'analyse* using a different method.⁶¹

The preface also contains a discussion of the reasons for studying probability. After mentioning a few uses of probability, including the detection of some fallacies of play, De Moivre has a lengthy discussion of superstition and luck. This is followed by a discussion of chance and design in which De Moivre asserts that events of very small probability can be attributed to design rather than chance.

De Moivre continued to work on the problem of the duration of play, improving on his earlier solutions to the problem. He took pains to acknowledge Montmort's and Bernoulli's solutions that appeared in the second edition of *Essay d'analyse*.⁶² De Moivre also discovered an entirely new and completely different approach to the solution to the duration of play. The method, stated without proof, was used to solve problem XLV in *The Doctrine of Chances*. De Moivre says of the proof:

I hope the Reader will excuse my not giving the Demonstration of some few things relating to this subject, especially of the two Theorems contained on page 134 and 154, and of the Method of Approximation contained in page 149 and 150; whereby the Duration of Play is easily determined with the help of Tables of Natural Sines: Those Demonstrations are omitted purposely to give an occasion to the Reader to exercise his own Ingenuity. In the mean time, I have deposited them with the Royal Society, in order to be published when it shall be thought requisite.⁶³

The proof, not published until 1722, was a very elegant use of mathematics that tied the new theory of probability to geometry, the mathematics of antiquity.⁶⁴

De Moivre's method of solution is based on the semicircle shown in Figure 4.⁶⁵ The method is used, but does not appear, in *The Doctrine of Chances*. The lengths of the vertical lines in the semicircle are the sines of

⁶¹ Ibid., xi.

⁶² Ibid., xiii and 122.

⁶³ Ibid., ix.

⁶⁴ Abraham De Moivre, "De fractionibus algebraicis radicalitate immunibus ad fractiones simpliciores reducendis, deque summandis terminis quarundam serierum aequali intervallo a se distantibus," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 32 (1722): 162–78.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

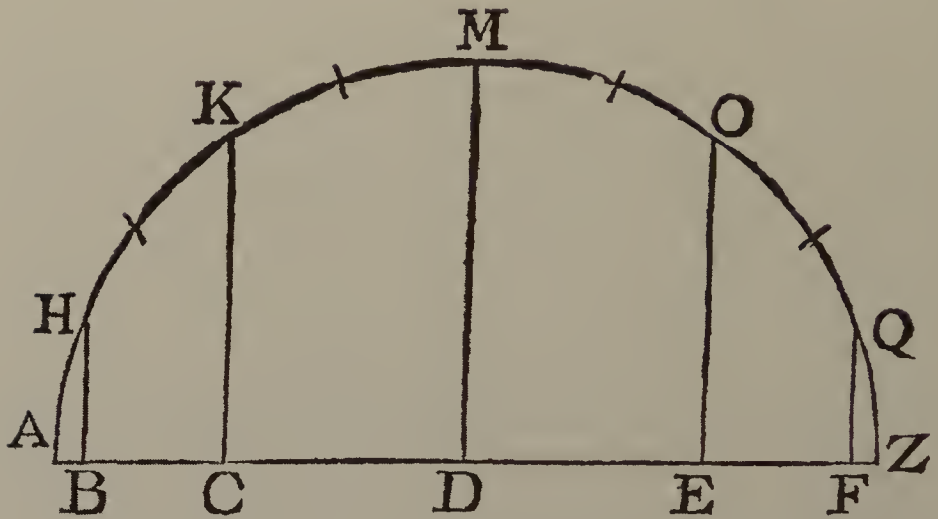


FIGURE 4: Semicircle for Solving the Duration of Play Problem.

angles defined by radii emanating from the point D in the semicircle. Although Figure 4 does not appear in *The Doctrine of Chances* and although no explanation for the solution is given, the semicircle makes its appearance in the only engraving, shown in Figure 5,⁶⁶ in *The Doctrine of Chances*.

The engraving is actually a direct response to Montmort, both to his claims for priority as mentioned in the 1713 *Essay d'analyse* and his claims about the importance of his work as shown in his own allegorical engraving. De Moivre's engraving is also an allegory and has several classical allusions, in fact many more than Montmort. Moreover, the semicircle is central to the interpretation of De Moivre's allegory. Montmort had lectured De Moivre on the history of the probability calculus; De Moivre in return gave Montmort a lecture in classical mythology.

Like Montmort's allegory, the foreground of De Moivre's engraving is divided into three parts. Each part is a response to the corresponding part in Montmort's allegory. Unlike Montmort, De Moivre chose a young, and up and coming, engraver, Bernard Baron, who had recently arrived from Paris.⁶⁷

At a circular table on the right hand side of Figure 5, the clean-shaven De Moivre has replaced Hermes and is instructing the three other men on the theory of probability. It is De Moivre who is pointing to the dice. The

⁶⁶ Reproduced with permission from the collection of Professor Stephen Stigler, University of Chicago.

⁶⁷ Sheila O'Connell, "Baron, Bernard (1696–1762)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1494>.



FIGURE 5: Engraving at the beginning of the *Doctrine of Chances*.

mortal, talking on an equal footing to other mortals, has become the one who can explain the outcome of the dice. De Moivre does not have the effrontery to speak directly to the gods and instruct them. The bearded men, all dressed in classical robes, are ancient philosophers and/or mathematicians. Eighteen years after the publication of *The Doctrine of Chances*, in a book review for the Royal Society⁶⁸ of Martin Kahle's *Elementa Logicae Probabilium*,⁶⁹ De Moivre made explicit the connection between the ancient and eighteenth-century approaches to probability:

This doctrine was first introduced by Huygens in the year 1657, in a little Treatise intituled: *Ratiocinia de Ludo Aleae*: and has since been followed by James Bernoulli, Monmort, Nicholas Bernoulli, myself and perhaps others. For altho' the ancients had the same Idea of Probability as we have; and they mentioned several degrees of it, as appears in the words *Probabile* and Probability often used by Cicero & other writers, yet the Author [Kahle] observes, that the distinct measure of it was never assigned till the times above mentioned:

Clearly, in the engraving in Figure 5 De Moivre is bringing the ancients up to date on modern probability.

Some names could be put forward to give specific identity to the three bearded gentlemen. My candidates for two of them are Aristotle and Euclid. Aristotle wrote on the topics of chance and probability, and his work was influential well into the Renaissance and after. One simple indication is that the references to Aristotle in Kahle's book far outnumber any other ancient writer. There are two reasons for choosing Euclid. The first is that Euclid systematized geometry and De Moivre has now systematized the calculus of chance. At the same time De Moivre had brought the calculation of chances into the realm of geometry through his solution to the problem of the duration of play. The second reason is Deslandes's poem to De Moivre in which De Moivre was called the "New Euclid."

In the middle of the engraving shown in Figure 5 are two naked boys sitting on the ground. A pair of dice lies at their feet, ignored by the boys. The cards have been tossed aside and the chessboard has been discarded a

⁶⁸ Letter Book, Volume 22, letter from De Moivre to Machin dated January 14, 1735/36, Royal Society Archives, London, England.

⁶⁹ Ludwig Martin Kahle, *Elementa Logicae Probabilium Methodo Mathematica in Usum Scientiarum et Vitae Adornata* (Halle: Renger, 1735).

further distance than the cards and dice. One of the boys is reading to the other a book, *The Doctrine of Chances*, explaining the newly discovered laws of chance. The discarded chessboard is of size 4×6 squares rather than the standard 8×8 as shown in Montmort's engraving in Figure 2, indicating that the *Essay d'analyse* is incomplete in its treatment of probability. This part of the engraving also has classical origins. It is probably based on the *Astragalizontes*, a famous bronze sculpture of two boys playing with knucklebones by Polykleitos that is mentioned in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* (xxxiv.19)⁷⁰ and much copied in antiquity.⁷¹ According to George Mooney,⁷² the statue may have been the inspiration for the story of Eros and Ganymede that is in the *Argonautika* by Apollonius of Rhodes. In the book Eros continually cheats at their game and wins everything from Ganymede (3.115–3.130).⁷³ The story leads to a possible stronger interpretation of the naked boys in Figure 5. Eros and Ganymede appear in another frontispiece from the gambling literature, a 1718 edition of the French rule books, now called *Académie universelle des jeux*. The engraving is shown in Figure 6.⁷⁴ At the bottom of the engraving Eros, identified by his wings, and Ganymede are gesturing to a woman, presumably enticing her to play. The reference to these gods in Figure 6 ties in with one of the general themes, sometimes explicit but often not, of rule books for games: know the rules so that you cannot be cheated through a misapplication of them. In the engraving in *The Doctrine of Chances* (Figure 5) neither boy has wings. According to Pierre Grimal,⁷⁵ Eros sometimes appears wingless so that an Eros and Ganymede interpretation for the boys in Figure 5 is not implausible. Given this interpretation, it is then Ganymede who is reading *The Doctrine of Chances* to Eros, thus ending Eros's exploitation of Ganymede. This interpretation ties in with the theme of fairness or justice that runs through *De Ratiociniis*, the first book on probability that De Moivre read.

⁷⁰ Pliny, *The Natural History*, trans. John Bostock and H.T. Riley (London: Taylor and Francis, 1855).

⁷¹ Walter Pater, *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1910), 292.

⁷² Apollonius, *The Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius, ed. G.W. Mooney (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1964), 229.

⁷³ Apollonius *The Argonautika: The Story of Jason and the Quest for the Golden Fleece*, trans. Peter Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 116.

⁷⁴ Reproduced with permission from the White Collection of the Cleveland Public Library.

⁷⁵ Pierre Grimal, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, trans. A.R. Maxwell-Hyslop (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 152–53.



FIGURE 6: Frontispiece of *Académie universelle des jeux*.

As in Montmort's allegory Athena appears on the left hand side of the picture. This time she is not talking to a mortal but to another goddess, in this case Tyche or Fortuna, the goddess of fortune. Athena has just given Fortuna a piece of paper with De Moivre's semicircle and lines written upon it, which is the key to De Moivre's unique mathematical insight into chance. The paper actually shows the whole circle, which Matthew Maty interprets as De Moivre's diagram superimposed on a wheel of fortune.⁷⁶ Thus De Moivre's mathematics dominates chance. Repeating this theme, Athena stands in a dominant position over Fortuna indicating that her new knowledge into chance has new control over fickle fate represented by Fortuna. The paper under the cornucopia represents previous writings on chance. Some of this previous work has borne fruit; the work is perhaps *De Ratiociniis*. The paper is illegible and is partially covered by Fortuna indicating that in the past Fortuna had triumphed over any previous knowledge about chance.

Taken as a whole, the engraving in *The Doctrine of Chances* is saying that De Moivre had done a better job at banishing Fortuna than Montmort. This claim is never stated in the text of the book but is very much evident in the picture. De Moivre would never show Montmort his geometrical solution to the problem of the duration of play, the solution involving the semicircle held by Fortuna in Figure 5. He waited until after Montmort's death to reveal the solution. De Moivre had deposited the proofs of his methods in manuscript form with the Royal Society on May 22, 1718. It was kept in Newton's custody. On May 5, 1720 De Moivre had the document opened before the Royal Society, only six months after Montmort's death.⁷⁷ Clearly he had wanted to keep the solution from Montmort rather than Nicolaus Bernoulli, who was very much alive at the time. It took another two years before the manuscript reached print.⁷⁸

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⁷⁶ "Mémoire de Mr. de Moivre," 26.

⁷⁷ De Moivre, Classified Papers 1660–1741, Cl.P.I.43, Royal Society Archives, London, England.

⁷⁸ De Moivre, "De Fractionibus Algebraicis."



*The Idea of Police in Eighteenth-Century England:
Discipline, Reformation, Superintendence,
c. 1780–1800*

F. M. Dodsworth

I.

Recent years have seen considerable interest in the idea of “police” in the eighteenth century.¹ “Police” in this archaic sense did not mean a uniformed force employed by the state to govern law and order, it implied a much more general system of government, the task of which was to regulate

¹ Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Princeton University Press, 1989); Roland Axtmann, “‘Police’ and the Formation of the Modern State: Legal and Ideological Assumptions on State Capacity in the Austrian Lands of the Hapsburg Empire, 1500–1800,” *German History* 10 (1992): 39–61; Michel Foucault, “Politics and Reason,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. A. Sheridan et al. (London: Routledge, 1988), 57–85; Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller, eds. *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1991), 87–104; Michel Foucault, “The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. C. Gordon, trans. C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham and K. Soper (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 166–82; Franz-Ludvig Knemeyer, “Polizei,” *Economy and Society* 9 (1980): 172–96; Pasquale Pasquino, “Theatrum Politicum: The Genealogy of Capital—Police and the State of Prosperity,” in Burchell, Gordon and Miller, ed. *The Foucault Effect*, 105–18; M. Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change in the Germanies and Russia, 1600–1800* (London: Yale University Press, 1983); Keith Tribe, “Cameratism and the Science of Government,” *Journal of Modern History* 56 (1984): 263–84.

broad aspects of communal existence with the aim of establishing the common good of the community and was closely associated with maintenance of the moral order, security and the maximization of national resources.

Police in this wider sense has long been understood as central to European political thought, but it was generally assumed that England did not possess a comparable concept or system. Historians of policing have recently demonstrated that this is mistaken, detailing the gradual development of English policing practices over the period 1660–1830, accelerating from the 1780s.² But this work largely focuses on the relationship between particular institutional reforms and local needs and politics. What this work does not do is engage with police on the broader conceptual level, particularly its relation to wider changes in the “mentality” of government, by which I mean “a way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what governing is; what or who is governed), capable of making that activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it was practiced.”³ Although discussed briefly in histories of policing, and more substantially in Andrew’s work on philanthropy, English discourses on police are nowhere engaged with on their own terms, as arguments for the reorganization of a general system of urban government.⁴

Discourses on English police do, however, surface occasionally in the work of several sociologists, who locate the transformation of English government in the eighteenth century in relation to several dominant explanations for this process common in social science: the emergence of modern governmentality, the “disciplinary society,” or “social control.” However, there remains scope for an historical engagement with, and deepening of this work.

² See J. M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660–1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Andrew T. Harris, *Policing the City: Crime and Legal Authority in London, 1740–1840* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004); Ruth Paley, “‘Imperfect, Inadequate and Wretched’? Policing London Before Peel,” *Criminal Justice History* 19 (1989): 95–130; Elaine A. Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies: The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London* (London: Stanford University Press, 1998).

³ Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,” in Burchell, Gordon and Miller, eds. *The Foucault Effect*, 1–51, at 3.

⁴ This debate on police appears in Andrew; Stanley Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland, 1780–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 89–91; David Philips, “‘A New Engine of Power and Authority’: The Institutionalization of Law-Enforcement in England, 1780–1830,” in V. A. C. Gatrell, B. Lenman, and G. Parker, eds. *Crime and the Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe Since 1500* (London: Europa, 1980), 155–89 at 165–68; Reynolds, 71–75.

Mitchell Dean, focusing on the English police of poverty, writes the subject into the Foucaultian narrative of the emergence of modern governmentality, arguing that eighteenth-century police passed from an early-modern concern with reforming the social order, to a desire to augment national power and prosperity through the enforcement of industry. Here, police was not concerned with reconstructing the old order but with achieving new national goals through the administration of the population. This was superseded by a “liberal” concept of prevention, where police means not the condition of order, but institutions for the prevention of threats to order, based around the management of the circumstances of its occurrence.⁵

Mark Neocleous, in work closely aligned with, but extending traditional histories of social control, offers a Marxist account of the establishment of mechanisms of urban discipline in the late eighteenth century, arguing they constitute the assumption of bourgeois control of the state, which not only saw an assault on traditional work practices in favor of the capitalist wage economy, creating the working class as a body, but simultaneously saw an attempt to inculcate bourgeois social values along with the new economic order.⁶

We can contribute to these sociological accounts with an historicist exploration of the emergence of “police” in England, avoiding the problem of locating English governmental practices in relation to German discourses, and at the same time extending the range of our study of English discourses on police. Dean and Neocleous, for example, draw principally on the work of Colquhoun and Gilbert, while mentioning Blackstone and Adam Smith as authors on police.⁷

John McMullan does focus directly on eighteenth-century English po-

⁵ Mitchell Dean, *The Constitution of Poverty: Toward a Genealogy of Liberal Government* (London: Routledge, 1991), 58, 63–66, 194–96.

⁶ Mark Neocleous, *The Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power* (London: Pluto, 2000); Mark Neocleous, “Social Police and the Mechanisms of Prevention: Patrick Colquhoun and Condition of Poverty,” *British Journal of Criminology* 40 (2000): 710–26; Mark Neocleous, “Policing and Pin-Making: Adam Smith, Police and the State of Prosperity,” *Policing and Society* 8 (1998): 425–49; see also A. P. Donajrodzki, “‘Social Police’ and the Bureaucratic Elite: A Vision of Order in the Age of Reform,” in A. P. Donajrodzki, ed. *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 51–76; Robert D. Storch, “The Policeman as Domestic Missionary: Urban Discipline and Popular Culture in Northern England, 1850–1880,” *Journal of Social History* 9 (1976): 481–509.

⁷ Neocleous, “Policing and Pin-Making,” 431, argues that before Colquhoun only Adam Smith and William Blackstone used the term police, ignoring the entire literature on the subject and the related issue of “civil government.”

lice discourse, writing it into a second Foucaultian narrative: the emergence of “disciplinary society.”⁸ However, he also draws on only two sources (Colquhoun and John Fielding) for the eighteenth century and does not fully locate these texts in their context. Like Dean and Neocleous, he places great emphasis on the government of the poor, idleness, and the typological and ethnographic approach to crime. But these features were common to discourse on disorder and vice from the sixteenth century, and English police was, like its European counterparts, not only concerned with poverty, but was conceived as a general system of government concerned with a broad sweep of issues.⁹ What is novel in the eighteenth century, in terms of discipline, is the structure of police that was mapped out by writers on the subject and the way this structure was legitimized. What was at issue was not simply the poverty of the lower orders, but rather their increased wealth and their consequent luxury or extravagance, which threatened both the enervation and corruption of the body politic and signified a lack of the Christian virtue of industriousness.

If the emergence of English police relates to the birth of “disciplinary society,” and if authors on police encourage, in various ways, the disciplining or social control of the population and their compulsion into industry, they do so in a particular context and for particular purposes, which are important not only in its successful legitimization, but which established the dynamics of police debate, and the essence of the police idea, for the nineteenth century.

If we want to understand how the field of government termed “police” was debated, legitimized, and distinguished from other modes of moral and political argument in England over the late eighteenth century, and therefore what constituted its point of innovation in relation to the mentality of government, we need to pay attention to the specific terms in which it was proposed and the way authors on the subject sought to define an improved police, of a particular form, as a solution to some of the problems that appeared pressing in public life.

⁸ John L. McMullan, “The Arresting Eye: Discourse, Surveillance and Disciplinary Administration in Early English Police Thinking,” *Social and Legal Studies* 7 (1998): 97–128; see also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), particularly 209–28.

⁹ On crime in the early modern period, see Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); James A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1999); Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Police discourse in England emerged as a particular kind of response to a moral question about the impact of commerce upon public virtue, understood both in the classical terms of disinterested public service and the Christian sense of popular morality. English society was confronting the possibility of its own finitude and locating itself on a trajectory of growth and decay, brought about by the accumulation of wealth, facing the possibility that it had reached the zenith of its power and was so enveloped in luxury that it was about to enter a phase of decline, likely to lead to internal tyranny or foreign conquest.¹⁰ But unlike the contemporary moral discourses identified by Pocock, which stressed the importance of virtuous example and political vigilance by the gentry, authors on police advocated a different solution: the “mechanization” of virtue through new systems of “superintendence” and regulation. Police was defined as the regulation of sites of temptation so as to prevent the acquisition of vicious habits, alongside the assumption that the police function was generally to establish good order and public morals. Industriousness, reformation, and prevention were bound up together in this discourse. Equally important was the emphasis on institutional regularity, uniformity and hierarchical subordination to overcome problems of laziness or personal interest.

II.

I shall begin by examining the nature of “police” in eighteenth-century England and its relation to the Foucaultian concepts of police as a mentality of government and the idea of disciplinary society. It is true that there were English discourses and practices of civil government that were very close to European systems of police in operation throughout the eighteenth century.¹¹ However, the term “police” came relatively late to

¹⁰ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1975); J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹¹ In addition to the works cited above, see Patrick E. Carroll, “Medical Police and the History of Public Health,” *Medical History* 46 (2002): 461–94; Alison Firth, “Moral Supervision and Autonomous Social Order: Wages and Consumption in 18th-century Economic Thought,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 15 (2002): 39–57; Alison Firth, “From Oeconomy to ‘the Economy’: Population and Self-Interest in Discourses on Government,” *History of the Human Sciences* 11 (1998): 19–35; Duncan Ivison, “Liberal Conduct,” *History of the Human Sciences* 6 (1993): 25–59; James Tully, “Governing Conduct”, in E. Leites, ed. *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 12–71.

England, not being commonly used until the 1760s, although it had been used in Scotland since the appointment of a Police Commissioner in 1714.¹²

Henry Fielding's *Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers*, published in January 1751, is generally regarded as the first significant work on preventative police, but he did not actually use the term "police" in this treatise. However, his work was referred to in these terms by later authors on police and clearly influenced them.¹³ Likewise, the Bow Street patrol he and his brother John established was referred to as a method of "police" by John Brown in his polemical morality tract *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757), where he compliments "the salutary Effects of a new Kind of Police, established by a useful Magistrate in the City of London."¹⁴ John Fielding was perhaps the first Englishman to entitle a work as concerned with police with his *An Account of the Origin and Effects of a Police Set on Foot* (1758). Jonas Hanway then wrote on *The Defects of Police* in 1775, republished in 1780 as *The Citizen's Monitor*, following which there were several treatises on the subject: Thomas Gilbert, *A Plan of Police* (1781, second edition 1786); Edward Sayer, *Observations on the Police or Civil Government of Westminster* (1784, second edition 1792); William Blizard, *Desultory Reflections on Police* (1785); George Barrett, *An Essay Towards Establishing a System of Police on Constitutional Principles* (1786); Henry Zouch, *Hints Respecting the Public Police* (1786); William Godschall, *A General Plan of Parochial and Provincial Police* (1787); Patrick Colquhoun, *General View of the National Police System* (1796) and *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (1796, seventh edition 1806).¹⁵ The cluster of publications in the 1780s centered on the Gordon riots of 1780, followed by the Pitt government's

¹² For history of the term in England, see L. Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law and its Administration since 1750*, 5 vols. (London: Stevens, 1948–86), vol. 3, *Cross-Currents in the Movement for the Reform of the Police* (1956), 1–6.

¹³ Fielding's work was referred to by his brother John (see below), William Blizard, *Desultory Reflections on Police: With an Essay on the Means of Preventing Crime and Amending Criminals* (London, 1785), 76; Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, facsimile of the 7th [1806] ed. (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), 453 n*; Jonas Hanway, *The Citizen's Monitor: Shewing The Necessity of a salutary Police . . .* (London, 1780), Advertisement, xviii–iv.

¹⁴ [John Brown], *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times . . .* (5th edn, London, 1757), 219.

¹⁵ This debate was largely Metropolitan, Henry Zouch, *Hints Respecting the Public Police* (London, 1786), being a rare contribution from Yorkshire.

attempt to introduce a “police bill” into parliament in 1785, and the royal proclamation on vice in 1787.¹⁶

These works were political in the sense that they were written at moments of crisis and to legitimize changes in the structure of government commonly considered problematic. Nonetheless, police is distinctive as a subject and it may well be that these authors sought to seize the moment to promote themselves, their work and ideas as much as being inspired by these events to write on the issues with which they were most familiar. At the same time it is a reasonable assumption that in going to the effort of producing substantial works and putting them in the public domain, in many cases searching for preferment or status in doing so, their authors expected them both to be taken seriously and to be convincing. These are not utopian works: they all sought to reform the existing system of government.

What did these authors mean by the term “police” and to which institutions did they refer? Proponents of an improved police were generally not arguing for the creation of a new system of government; they argued they already had a police, but it was not very effective. The subject of “police” debate was simply the existing system of civil government whose task was to govern the peace and order of local communities, these being the quarter and petty sessions of the peace, the court leet and court baron, and the parish vestry. Their officers included magistrates, constables, churchwardens, beadles, overseers, surveyors of the highway and so forth that made up the patchwork of English government. “Police” was also one of the more common names given to the “improvement” commissions established in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century for the better government of various towns, including Manchester and Birmingham.

For example, two magistrates “W. H.” and William Mainwaring both referred to existing systems of government, the quarter sessions of the peace, the magistracy and so on, as “police.” Likewise, Manchester’s system of government, the manorial court leet was referred to as a system of “police” by William Roberts in the same period.¹⁷ In 1799 Patrick Colquo-

¹⁶ For more on the context here, see Reynolds.

¹⁷ W. H., *Some Hints Towards a Revisal of the Penal Laws, the better regulating the Police, and the Necessity of enforcing the Execution of Justice . . .* (London, 1787); William Mainwaring, *An Address to the Grand Jury of the County of Middlesex . . .* (London, 1785), 3; William Roberts, *A Charge to the Grand Jury of the Court Leet for the Manor of Manchester . . . Delivered at the Michaelmas Court on 15th October 1788, second edition* (London, 1793), 16.

hun even referred to the Duke of Portland, Secretary of State for the Home Department, as “his Majesty’s Minister for the Police Department,” aligning “police” with the general administration of the state.¹⁸

The tasks of police, then, were those for which these bodies were responsible and they are as diverse and comprehensive as comparable European systems of police. Sayer considers the system of “police” to cover the “peace offices” generally, as well as broad systems of urban government. He traces these structures and jurisdictions back to their alleged Saxon origins, referring to them as “police” throughout. It is clear, then, that the term “police” is completely synonymous with “civil government” or the “civil power” in Sayer’s work and includes all the functions of parish and manorial rule. The functions he considers aspects of “a *general* police” according to the ancient statutes include “all matters of incontinence, common scolds, and of inmates and common annoyances,” as well as offenders against the peace, weights and measures, charity and hospitals, sewerage, government of the poor, the provision of a watch, paving, lighting and cleaning of the streets, regulating the price of bread, regulation of markets and the establishment of prices for all commodities and licensing places of public entertainment.¹⁹

If Sayer might be thought untypical, compare this to the work of Godschall, whose concern for good police encompassed the offices of high and petty constable, and the surveyor of the highway, to whose role particularly detailed treatment was given. Godschall’s concern was for both “morals and œconomy” and involved the subjects of begging and vagrancy, chapmen, poachers, smugglers, the education of the young and (if necessary forcible) apprenticing, the watching of ale houses, the industry of the poor and the conduct of religion, particularly in the poor houses. The petty constable was to concern himself especially with drinking, gambling or playing sport on a Sunday, to inform the magistrates of houses of “ill fame,” or young able-bodied men who were idle or refused to work for “the usual wages,” as well as watching vagrants and beggars, pursuing hedge-breakers and wood-stealers, robbers, unlicensed publicans, rogues, anyone behaving suspiciously at night, and those using short weights and measures.²⁰ But Godschall’s concern was not only for the moral and economic order, he

¹⁸ Patrick Colquhoun, *A General View of the National Police System, Recommended by the Select Committee on Finance to the House of Commons . . .* (London, 1796), 1.

¹⁹ Edward Sayer, *Observations on the Police or Civil Government of Westminster, with a Proposal for a Reform* (London, 1784), 8–10, 15–16.

²⁰ Willam M. Godschall, *A General Plan of Parochial and Provincial Police* (London, 1787), x, 4, 10, 23–24, 26–28, 34, 41–43.

was also interested in the material environment of the town itself. The surveyor of the highway was encouraged to pay attention to “every road, foot-path, post, rail, fence, pits unfenced, bridge, water course, over-hanging hedge, bush, tree, straw for dung, ditch scowring, timber logs, and every other annoyance whatsoever,” including anything obstructing the highway, particularly wagons or coaches, or anyone encroaching upon the highway with their property.²¹ Not only, then, was the notion of disciplining the population clearly nothing new, but if English government was contrasted to the “French” system, what was objected to could not be the potential degree of governmental interference in the lives of the people.

It is worth noting in passing that if we compare the concerns of English police with the focus of Duchesne’s *Code de la Police* (Paris, 1757) there are clearly some strong similarities. Police here implied a concern with the detailed regulation of such diverse subjects as religion, customs, health, foodstuffs, highways, tranquility and public order, sciences and the liberal arts, commerce, manufactures, servants, and the police of the poor.²² The emphasis here was on the formation of the social body, the detailed ordering of life.²³ This was clearly also a feature of both the conceptualization and practice of English government in the same period. Jonas Hanway defined “police” as “the *minutiae* of government,” and aligned it with “a habit of *discipline*,” and a “*reformation*” in the morals of the people.²⁴ This involved the correct organization and regulation of the many branches of police so as to prevent as few individuals as possible from falling irreparably into a life of vice, reforming those who did so in their early steps down that path. With this in mind, Hanway went on to range broadly over the condition of charitable hospitals, education, the press, prisons, work-houses, the conduct of servants and theatrical performances, all of which could function more effectively to rescue the sinner and lessen the occasion for, and attraction of, sin.

What, then, was the significance of the term “police,” if all they were talking about was the existing system of government? Those who used the term “police” in England were generally not arguing exclusively for greater energy from the existing authorities. Even those who saw this as their principal aim (such as Blizard or Godschall) also argued for reform and some reorganization in the system and were generally agreed about the kind of

²¹ *Ibid.*, 58 and ff, 64–65.

²² Quoted in Pasquino, 110.

²³ Pasquino, 111.

²⁴ Hanway, *Letters*, 11; *Advertisement*, ix, xxv.

reform that was required. Most authors who used the term police sought to reform the structure of government, introducing regularity and uniformity, principally through better systems of “superintendence.” As is well-known from the literature on policing, the disunity and disorganization of the existing mechanisms of rule was one major feature of arguments for an improved police.²⁵ Sayer argued that the existing system of police was “Like the different parts of a great machine, adjusted upon a mistaken principle.”²⁶

For example, writing with awareness of the government’s coming attempts to reform the Westminster police, and in response to the recent Gordon riots, Sayer sought to unite two different structures of police in Westminster, one of which had the necessary powers and no organization, while the other was well structured but without the necessary authority. The solution was to join them so that “the unsettled activity of the one Jurisdiction will be transferred over to the consistency and regularity of the other.”²⁷ George Barrett’s *Essay* is exemplary in this sense, containing little more than detailed suggestions for the structure of a new police system, while Godschall too spoke of “management” of morals and “systematic regulation.”²⁸ For Patrick Colquhoun, the way of achieving the ends of police, which were “Security to the Person and Property of the peaceful Subject; the Morals of the People, and the general Finances of the Country,” was to be achieved by “bringing under regulation a variety of dangerous and suspicious trades.” This involved the extension of a licensing system across the whole of the Kingdom and the formation of a “chain of connection” between the proposed central board of police and every district in the country.²⁹ Such a central board was, he argued, absolutely necessary, as the whole system was linked together with the police board acting as a “keystone.” He stressed that a central board would naturally generate the “accurate information” necessary to effective government, arguing that “superintendence should not be divided, but that it should be confined intirely [sic] to the Board, where all intelligence is supposed to center.”³⁰

The authors cited above focus on the regular sub-division of space, and the continuous supervision and circulation of information, producing a disciplinary machine, obviating previous problems with negligence of

²⁵ As to whether this was accurate or not see Beattie; Harris; Paley; Reynolds.

²⁶ Sayer, 11.

²⁷ Sayer, iv-v, 16, 32, 35 and throughout.

²⁸ Godschall, 15, 29.

²⁹ Colquhoun, *General View*, 6, 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10, 13, 27–28.

duty or individual weakness. Regularity and uniformity were central concepts here, for this mechanism of discipline would operate ceaselessly and not be reliant on the capacities and energy of any particular individual. For most authors on the subject this necessitated payment of the officers and hierarchical organization or subordination.

As McMullan points out, there is an obvious link between the police patrol and the disciplinary society, with the policeman as “the personification of panopticism.”³¹ The very idea of patrol as a mechanism of crime prevention was that criminals would be deterred because they never knew whether or not a watchman or later a police officer might be approaching, and that there was always one within easy reach should anyone call for assistance. At the same time such mechanisms of surveillance or “superintendence” as it was more commonly termed at the time, were central to the maintenance of discipline within the newly-established systems of paid police. The random circulation of inspectors or superintendents of the watch was one of the most common methods for ensuring that watchmen carried out their duty properly.³² But more broadly than this, there is clearly a deeper link to Foucault’s concept of the “technical” nature of disciplinary society with his notion of cellular division, hierarchical observation, normalization, the circulation of information and precise regulation of time and space, which these authors sought to generalize throughout the social body.³³

But we must be precise about the nature of the change being advocated here. As Sayer acknowledges, the sub-division of government itself was not particularly novel, for this principle has a long tradition in the structure of English local government, divided by county, hundred and parish, as well as the specific jurisdictions held by parochial and manorial officers, which often defined their duty of inspection over particular products at the level of certain markets or streets. If there is novelty in this system, it lies in the emphasis on regularity and uniformity in the structure of division, as opposed to the customary forms already in existence, alongside, of course, the creation of dedicated, salaried offices.³⁴ It may be that this is why the term “police” was preferred, because it signified the unity of purpose and organi-

³¹ McMullan, 122.

³² For the history of such practices see Beattie; Harris; Reynolds.

³³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 224; see also 135–94.

³⁴ Sayer, 12n*, 13–14 and n*, refers directly to the French police in these terms. See also Sayer, 44, 47n*. His source for this information is unattributed but clearly [William Mildmay], *The Police of France . . .* (London, 1763), particularly 43–57, 62–64, 87, 91, 136–37.

zation thought to be characteristic of the French system of government, made famous by Mildmay, who saw the effective government of Paris stemming from the sub-division of duty, interdependence, hierarchy, and the existence of dedicated officers whose sole task was policing.³⁵

III.

Clearly, the concerns of authors on English police were comparable with those of their European cousins, and there is close resemblance between the sense of institutional reform common to many of these works and a mentality of government identified as “disciplinary.” But if we were to leave the description of English police at this level, we would have understood little of its purpose and significance. If the practice of disciplining the population was itself relatively uncontroversial, the mechanisms they were proposing to achieve this, salaried officers, in some cases financed and even controlled by the government, were far more so. It was argued that “police” signified French-style despotism and arbitrary rule: “Permit me, Sir, from my prejudices as an Englishman, and let me add, from my knowledge as a lawyer, to express my objections to the word *Police*. The term is established under a government which it cannot be your intention to imitate. It is too closely connected with French systems, to be admitted hastily into a system of English jurisprudence.”³⁶ The logic of such opposition to police reform revolved around the ‘country’ argument that national liberty depended upon the balance of the constitution, which secured the independence of the free-born Englishman from the threat of arbitrary power. The greatest threat to freedom was commonly defined as the accumulation of excess power by the executive branch of government, particular dangers being placemen and salaried government officials, who would bend to the will of ministers for financial reward, and a standing army, paid by the executive, who could enforce the will of the monarch and their ministers on parliament or the people.³⁷

³⁵ Mildmay, 44, 61. The regularity and uniformity of this sub-division was central to both the structure and perception of French police. My thanks to Clive Emsley for emphasizing this point to me.

³⁶ *A Letter to Archibald Macdonald, Esq. on the Intended Plan for Reform in what is called the Police of Westminster*, 2nd edn (London, [1786]), 7.

³⁷ For opposition to police reform see Philips. On “country” discourse more generally, see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment* and *Virtue, Commerce, and History*; Shelley Burt, *Virtue Transformed: Political Argument in England, 1688–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cam-

But that does not mean the idea was universally eschewed. Indeed, concerns that police was unconstitutional were directly countered by authors who aligned themselves with that term: “It hath been a frequent complaint, that the nature of our constitution will not admit of a *police*; in other words it will not admit of such salutary domestic regulations, as are calculated to preserve the lives and properties of the people, from that violence and rapine they are subject to, and which sometimes aim a dagger at the vitals of liberty.” Without police, Hanway argued, “there can be none of those restrictive regulations which are preparatory to the execution of laws of the greatest importance. For the same reason it is as essential to the support of a *free* people, in their liberty, as it is necessary in a *despotic* government to maintain authority.”³⁸ Liberty, for Hanway, meant the rule of law under conditions of restraint, and was opposed to licentiousness or slavery; it did not signify liberal non-interference or liberation. Raising the figures of “mob rule” and anarchy, the opposite of the rule of law and as destructive of liberty as tyranny, Hanway stressed the importance of attention to internal government, “without which we can never be happy, *because not really free*.”³⁹ Sayer concurred, arguing failure to regulate the police threatened “the grievous slavery of *no* government.”⁴⁰

The task facing advocates of a reformed police was to refute country arguments. The method they chose was to argue that failure to reform would itself bring about the constitutional imbalance feared by the opposition, only from another source. At the same time they argued that reorganizing the system of police would itself preserve public virtue by preventing temptations to corruption in both the officers of police, and the wider body politic.

The crucial example alluded to by most moralists was that of Rome, whose mixed form of government was compared to that of Britain and whose decline from a free republic to an empire under the tyranny of the Caesars, and ultimately barbarian conquest, was held out as the ultimate example of what might befall a nation corrupted by luxury. Like those articulating a standard “country” position, authors on police also deployed the example of Roman decline as the likely future for Britain, but in con-

bridge University Press, 1998) and Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 2, *Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) modifies this argument, suggesting Roman sources were the key reference point, in contrast to the Aristotelian framework identified by Pocock.

³⁸ Hanway, Advertisement, iii; Letters, 11–12.

³⁹ Ibid., Advertisement, xx.

⁴⁰ Sayer, 48; on liberty in opposition to slavery, see Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*.

trast to opposition discourse, they argued that it was the popular element and its licentiousness that was unbalancing the constitution, just as, they argued, had been the case with Rome. As Colquhoun put it, "the corruption of morals, licentiousness, and crimes, are known to advance in proportion to riches." He went on to invoke the ultimate example of what befell a nation in that condition: "like the Roman government, when enveloped in riches and luxury, the National prosperity will be of short duration, hazarding the same calamities wherever public morals are neglected, and no effectual measure adopted for the purpose either of checking the alarming growth of depravity and crimes, or of guarding the rising generation against the evil examples which are exhibited in the metropolis, perhaps in a greater degree than was ever before experienced."⁴¹ Here Colquhoun was drawing on a series of themes which recurred throughout writing on the subject of police: the threat of commerce to morals and the possibility of temptation into vice by the "evil examples" which were more prevalent in modern, commercial society, in particular drawing the young into their clutches at an early age and so insensibly ensnaring them in a life of vice from which they would never be able to escape.

Similar arguments were developed by almost all authors who elaborated on the subject at length, either stressing a direct relationship between the nature of modern, commercial society and popular licentiousness, or pointing out a lack of application in the government of the people. Godschall argued at the very beginning of his work that the subject of police required attention particularly "In a Nation like this, where commerce and riches furnish the means of luxury and indulgence to many, and beget a temptation to them in the minds of all," while at the same time he lamented negligence and inattention regarding popular conduct.⁴² Edward Sayer agreed, like Colquhoun drawing the analogy between England and Rome: "in proportion as civilization and the elegant arts of life advance, the conveniences of individuals have been studied more and more. In the government of ancient Rome, established upon the polished institutions of Athens, this consideration was, perhaps, carried too far," adding that such refinements "tended to destroy the liberty, because they corrupted the morals, and enervated the industry of Rome."⁴³ Elsewhere he argued that "the refinements of amusement are the great symptoms and the great causes of the decline of

⁴¹ [Patrick Colquhoun], *A Treatise on the police of the metropolis . . . The second edition, revised and enlarged. By a magistrate* (London, 1796), xii.

⁴² Godschall, vii.

⁴³ Sayer, 13 and n*, 13–14.

states,” and that “our debilitated taste applies [i.e. turns towards] to the strong sauces of refinement, which, while they gratify, destroy. The simplicity of England is gone!” He continued: “If some stop is not put to the progress of these irrational, but seducing, amusements, we shall sink rapidly into that state of general corruption which induced the Romans to prefer the bloody combats of hired Gladiators to the simplicity of rustic games, and give up their honest and hardy Song for the lewd unmanly piping of an Eunuch.”⁴⁴ Hanway, too, argued that Britain must “not act as the *Romans*, in the height of their glory, and fall by our own hands!”⁴⁵

A reformed system of police was not to control the spread of luxury directly by closely regulating and restricting commercial activity, rather it was to act as a form of moral education, compensating for the apparent lack of religious and civil instruction in the general populace. This was explicitly articulated as the purpose of police by John Fielding: “Religion, Education and Good-breeding preserve good Order and Decency among the superior Rank of Mankind, and prevent those Disturbances, Irregularities and Injuries to our Fellow-Creatures, that happen among the illiterate and lower Order of the People: Good Laws, therefore, are necessary to supply the Place of Education among the Populace.”⁴⁶ This was echoed by Colquhoun: “the evil propensities incident to human nature appear no longer restrained by the force of religion, or the influence of the moral principle.—On these barriers powerful attacks have been made, which hitherto have operated as curbs to the unruly passions peculiar to vulgar life.”⁴⁷

The common people, it was argued, lacked the self-discipline and morality provided by a liberal education; rather they acted according to passion and impulse. Lacking this capacity to govern themselves, they had to be governed by others. This government of the poor by the rich with the aim of promoting industry could be taken by Marxists to signify the emergence of capitalist society with its attendant assumption of governmental power by the bourgeoisie and their social control of “the working class” in general. But it is highly questionable whether the “lower classes” in the eighteenth-century sense can easily be aligned with the “working class” in a Marxist sense.⁴⁸ Neocleous might be correct in suggesting that one of the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, n*, 47–48, my interpellation.

⁴⁵ Hanway, Advertisement, xxvi.

⁴⁶ J. Fielding, *An Account of the Origin*, viii.

⁴⁷ Colquhoun, *General View*, 28.

⁴⁸ On the idea of “class” in the eighteenth century see J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1660–1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics During the Ancien Regime*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 164–200; Penelope J. Corfield, “Class by name and number in eighteenth-century Britain,” *History* 72 (1987): 38–61.

effects of police was to fabricate the working class, but this does not tell us, as he assumes, what the “purpose” of police was.⁴⁹ To apply the vague notion of class interest to the actions of the growing “middling sort,” who largely made up the ranks of police reformers, is both reductive and, in this period, anachronistic and a Marxist definition of industry muffles many aspects of its contemporary resonance. If one of the aims of police was to increase industriousness, this notion was bound up in the work of John Fielding with a series of discourses about the necessity of maximizing the strength of the nation in relation to its European competitors. Industry was not configured simply as the source of profit, but as the condition for national success and even, in the context of frequent international wars, survival, so that the effectiveness of the system of police was directly related to the strength of the state. We must remember that the strength of the state and the possibility of its weakening from within were recurrent themes in the neo-classical story of the rise and fall of empires which dominated eighteenth-century perceptions of the place of Britain in the world order. Moral treatises, as well as the literature on civil government or the civil power, were constantly reiterating the threat of the corruption and enervation of the body politic through the vices of the people.

At the same time, of course, industry was closely aligned with virtue and happiness and had no sense of the meaning it was to acquire in the nineteenth century in relation to manufacturing or a manufacturing class. Johnson’s *Dictionary* defined industry as “diligence” and aligned it with the Christian virtue of industriousness.⁵⁰ Industry was linked to piety, duty and virtue and opposed to idleness, licentiousness, temptation and vice.⁵¹ The happiness of the state depended both on the availability of commodities and increase of wealth, but also on conditions of peace and security, which were directly threatened by the idle laborer, who was likely to fall into a life of vice and crime, undermining these conditions. If Godschall was concerned to encourage the poor into industry, this was as much because idleness was “a parent to vice” and therefore “equally detrimental to the community and individual” as it was due to the fact that it was “highly detrimental to public œconomy.”⁵² Indeed, the general target here was more than the simple prevention of idleness: these authors were concerned more

⁴⁹ Neocleous, *Fabrication of Social Order*.

⁵⁰ Clark, 5.

⁵¹ William Adams, *The Duties of Industry, Frugality and Sobriety. A Sermon . . .* (Shrewsbury, 1777), 13–16; Peter Bulmer, *A Sermon Preached at Horncastle . . . Before the Society for the Promotion of Industry* (Stamford, 1790), 3–5, 7–8.

⁵² Godschall, 26.

broadly to prevent the corruption of morals which were the occasions for crime and the enervation of the industriousness that sustained the healthy body politic. The way vice and dissipation could be prevented is clear for Fielding: “to remove from Sight all Temptation to Idleness.”⁵³

Hanway, too, was concerned for the inculcation of (moral) discipline in this sense. He sought to govern what he saw as the most powerful principle affecting conduct: the love of pleasure.⁵⁴ For Hanway, the only way to combat this simple direction towards objects of pleasure, if they were potentially vicious, was to accustom people to particular ways of acting through the discipline of police. “Mankind,” he wrote, “will act as they are *taught*, and practice that which their minds are accustomed to entertain with complacency, be it ever so evil. The execution of *good laws* as naturally introduces *good morals*, as the neglect of them has a contrary effect. It is the same in *religious* matters.”⁵⁵ The system of police was to regulate the social environment so as to habituate the people into discipline and remove the most prominent temptations to vice. Unfortunately, the laws were not being properly enforced because the higher orders themselves were negligent: “in every rank folly predominates: if our superiors lose their taste for what is great and manly, the *correction* by a well-regulated *police* will be *neglected*.” If the higher ranks were “less dissipated and extravagant,” he argued, the lower ranks would be better governed, not only by the example of their superiors, but because these superiors would have more time to devote to their duty, which was enforcing the moral conduct of their inferiors. Even ministers, he argued, were not driving home the significance of religious observation and principles forcefully enough. In the meantime, “our appetites are stimulated by the numerous provocatives [sic] to *debauchery* which we find in every corner” and there was no discipline, either internally for the higher ranks through education in virtue, or externally for the lower ranks through police conducted by the higher orders, which would prevent the weak sinner from succumbing to such temptation.⁵⁶

The causes of this decline in order and growth of evil were a reluctance to enforce harsh laws and their irregular and lax administration, but also “the intemperate pursuit of pleasure and the impiety and irreligion of the times.” Of course, he argues, these exist in all countries, but “the people in

⁵³ J. Fielding, *An Account of the Origin*, ix.

⁵⁴ Here he is drawing on Henry Fielding, “An Enquiry into the Cause of the Late Increase of Robbers,” [1751] in M. R. Zirker, ed., *An Enquiry into the Cause of the Late Increase of Robbers, and other Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 79.

⁵⁵ Hanway, Letters, 2, 3–4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Letters, 4.

the most civilised parts of Europe being more awed by *police*, do not so often commit monstrous enormities. *They* are in a habit of *discipline*: *We* are as undisciplined, as if we sought the ruin of liberty.”⁵⁷ The function of police, then, was to habituate people into the discipline necessary for liberty to be feasible.

It is tempting to consider Hanway’s contribution to English government in the light of the fact that he had spent several years working in Portugal and Russia and had traveled through Germany and the Netherlands.⁵⁸ Equally significant is his association with John Fielding through their mutual work in the Marine Society (which arranged for boys in distressed circumstances to enter the navy) and the Magdalen Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes, both of which aimed to prevent the growth of crime by governing the problem of vice.⁵⁹

Hanway and his (largely Evangelical) successors took the Christian view of life as a trial, where the sinner was constantly tested by confrontation with temptations to sin and in which vice and folly fought more generally against redemption. In this context the most important political knowledge was to know “how to restrain the vices, and give the virtues of the people their proper bias.” The source of vice, he argued, was not straightforward luxury, as many argued, but extravagance, which “serves to reconcile individuals to the crime of ruining themselves.”⁶⁰

This was an explicitly Christian mission. Hanway wrote “I lay my foundation on the rock of *religion*, having every day fresh reason to believe, it is the only true foundation of government; and that the national security and happiness must decay with the neglect of it,” and again “the detail of government, or call it *police*, depends on religion.”⁶¹ Like Fielding, he saw religion as providing the moral rule by which people could judge their own conduct, and the role of police was to ensure that society maintained Christian morality even where many of the common people had little in the way of religious inclination or education. “It is high time” wrote Hanway, “that we should pursue plans of *reformation*”, urging that “We should be more active in *preventing evil*.” Could this be achieved, he asked, without a “*regular, strict, and consistent police*?”⁶² Police, then, was to be the agent of

⁵⁷ Ibid., Advertisement, ix.

⁵⁸ Although he refers to Prussian sumptuary law only once, *ibid.*, Letters, 277.

⁵⁹ On which see Andrew.

⁶⁰ Hanway, Letters, 5. Compare J. Fielding, *An Account of the Origin*, viii-ix, where he also speaks of the prevention of extravagance, rather than the more usual luxury.

⁶¹ Hanway, Dedication, ii, iii.

⁶² Ibid., Advertisement, vi-vii.

moral reformation in the English people to complete the task begun by the political-religious reformation already cemented in the English constitution.⁶³ He went on to argue: “I have no conception how this great work can be accomplished, but in a regular mode of *prevention*. A disease, which has taken root in the *habit*, cannot be eradicated without a *regimen*.”⁶⁴ This theme was common throughout writing on “police,” in which prevention was defined as regulation of the social environment and particular trades so as to remove the temptation for vice or crime, coupled with the inculcation of disciplined habits in the population.

Such arguments continued right up to the end of the eighteenth century. Concerned that the new system of commerce and growth of riches “furnish the means of luxury and indulgence to many, and beget a temptation to them in the minds of all,” Godschall sought “to stop the progress of profaneness and immorality” occasioned by this condition through directing concern to the “want of attention to the conduct of the lower degree of the people, the want of discipline and employment for the adult, and of instruction for the infant poor,” and in general “to prevent stagnation and corruption in the moral as in the natural world.”⁶⁵ Colquhoun likewise sought to “check the progress of turpitude and vice,” which required first attending “to the Morals and the Habits of the rising Generation; to adapt the Laws more particularly to the manners of the People, by minutely examining the state of Society, so as to lead the inferior orders, as it were, insensibly into better Habits, by gentle restraints upon those propensities which terminate in Idleness and Debauchery;—to remove temptations, in their nature productive of evil, and to establish incitements to good and useful pursuits.”⁶⁶

The link between the cyclical rise and fall of empires and the moral state of the population had been made before; the threat of luxury in classical terms and vice and temptation into sin were established features of moral discourse. But what is interesting in the police literature is the sense that the solutions to these problems were not to be found solely within the individual. These aspects are not entirely ignored, particularly for the gentry, who were roundly criticized for their neglect of duty in favor of luxury

⁶³ This concept was common to movements for moral reform from 1688 onwards: see D. Bahlman, *The Moral Revolution of 1688* (London: Yale University Press, 1957); Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29–32.

⁶⁴ Hanway, Letters, 23.

⁶⁵ Godschall, vii–viii.

⁶⁶ Colquhoun, *General View*, 29–30.

and reward. However, the principal assumption of police was that the temptations to vice in a free, commercial society were so great that the individual, particularly those who lacked the resources provided by a gentlemanly education, could not resist these new and prevalent temptations on their own. The traditional Christian discourse of the struggle of the individual sinner against the temptations of vice was being modified so that the whole of society, particularly the gentry, shared responsibility for helping the weak resist temptation. This was a theme that was central to police in the eighteenth century, as was the notion that habituation into discipline and morality was a solution. At the same time, this was united with the notion of prevention, so that police became concerned not only with the enforcement of moral habits, but with the reduction of sites of temptation (disorderly pubs and brothels, theatres) through regulation of the urban environment.⁶⁷

IV.

Although their works are by no means identical in terms of structure and genre, eighteenth-century advocates of an English police shared many assumptions about the nature and best practice of government with their European counterparts. Police in eighteenth-century England was understood as a general system for the administration of communal life whose task was the production of the common good. However, arguments about English police were articulated in relation to a set of concerns specific to English, even to Metropolitan, political culture. Moral reformation implied both the completion of the religious work of Luther and Calvin and also of the political work of the Glorious Revolution. It also had implications for the maintenance of the freedom of the state, and as such the citizens. The encouragement of industriousness and prevention of vice and corruption in the body politic was intrinsically related to this through the trope of the cyclical growth and decay of empires, which took place in part through neglect of public morals. The solution was to regulate the environment and conduct of individuals so as to reduce the temptations that modern, commercial society held out towards vice and crime.

It is clear from this that police is closely related to general movements

⁶⁷ The history of licensing is addressed in Mariana Valverde, "Police Science, British Style: Pub Licensing and Knowledge of Urban Disorder," *Economy and Society* 32 (2003): 234–52.

for moral reform, common and recurrent throughout the long eighteenth century.⁶⁸ But police differs somewhat from both the movements for the reformation of manners and the literature on civil government. Like both these bodies of discourse, police was concerned with the moral reformation of the body politic, but unlike these modes of writing police did not simply seek to encourage or legitimize the use of the existing systems of government, it sought to do so more effectively by reforming their structure, in many senses intellectually engaging with and codifying contemporaneous developments in governmental practice. For authors on English police the solution to the perceived problem of popular disorder and gentry negligence occasioned by commercial society was to elaborate new structures which would operate in a ceaseless and uniform manner to structure the social environment so as to reduce sites of temptation to vice and at the same time monitor the activity of suspicious individuals and groups. In this sense, arguments for novel organizational reform were presented as a solution to ancient, perennial problems. Police was defined as a “new science,” applying reason to the “regular dependence of causes and effects” concerned in the question of virtue and vice.⁶⁹

To some degree, authors on police were disseminating the idea of disciplinary society by acting to legitimize the importation from France of hierarchical disciplinary structures into English political culture. But in doing so, they did far more than simply legitimize certain practices, they reconfigured the problem-space of government, defining disorder, vice and crime in terms of processes, causes and solutions that exceeded the moral capacity of the individual, and as such form part of the emerging “sociological imagination” of the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ A reorganized police and system of prevention were defined as humanitarian moves that would compensate institutionally for the natural weakness of mankind, counteracting the tendency towards temptation and corruption, perceived to be endemic in the

⁶⁸ On which see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Chicago University Press, 1992); Hunt; Joanna Innes, “Politics and Morals: The Reformation of Manners Movement in Later Eighteenth-Century England,” in E. Hellmuth, ed. *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 57–118; M. J. D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also the various essays in L. Davison, T. Hitchcock, T. Keirn and R. B. Shoemaker, eds. *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689–1750* (Stroud: Allan Sutton, 1992).

⁶⁹ Colquhoun, *Treatise* 7th [1806] edn, Preface, n.p.; Blizard, 10.

⁷⁰ On which see Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 103–23 and throughout.

body politic and part of the fallen human condition, but which had been exacerbated under the conditions of commercial society, increasing the opportunities for temptation while undermining the restraints of the traditional order.

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The Style of Linguistics: Aby Warburg, Karl Vossler, and Hermann Osthoff

Anna Guillemin

In the last paragraphs of his 1893 dissertation, the Hamburg art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929) startled his readers by suggesting that the painter Sandro Botticelli had mindlessly imitated classical motifs from the past. Of all the Quattrocento artists, “Botticelli was one of those who were all too pliable.”¹ After Warburg’s long and careful exegesis of the classical references in *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus*, his dismissal of the artist’s derivative style came as a surprise. A decade later, Warburg gave a lecture to the Hamburg Philological Society on a drawing by Albrecht Dürer, “The Death of Orpheus,” which shows the mythical poet kneeling, an arm sheltering his head, pleading for his life against two branch-wielding maenads. The doomed poet’s gesture fascinated Warburg, but here too he worried about imitation in Dürer’s style, arguing that the artist relied too heavily on Italianate conventions of representation, which were themselves borrowed from classical antiquity. In both analyses, then, Warburg explored the art historical term style—here the emerging styles of the southern and northern Renaissance—as a dynamic of imitation and reappropriation, a struggle with conventions and normative expectations.

¹ “Botticelli war schon einer von denen, die allzu biegsam waren.” Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften: Studienausgabe*, ed. Horst Bredekamp (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), 55 (GS). Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, ed. Kurt W. Forester, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 141 (RPA).

Conceptualizing style in the Dürer essay, Warburg added a new dimension to his analysis. He concluded by marveling at the “long migration” that brought what he called “antique superlatives of gestures from Athens, by way of Rome, Mantua, and Florence, to Nuremberg and into the mind of Albrecht Dürer.”² He borrowed a grammatical term, the superlative, to characterize the dramatic, narratively significant actions in Dürer’s drawing, and imagined a journey of these visual set pieces over time and geographic space not unlike that of a language, changing, shifting, becoming contaminated, and developing new dialects. Warburg, in theorizing style, thus harnessed an unexpectedly technical linguistic vocabulary to his art historical claims.

The German Romance philologist Karl Vossler (1872–1949) began his career in the early 1900s writing about style and language as well. His earliest publications explored style in literature, be it the “sweet new style” of Dante and his contemporaries, or the prose of Benvenuto Cellini.³ Soon Vossler’s interests in linguistics, stemming especially from his strong friendship with Benedetto Croce, manifested themselves in explicitly linguistic treatises. In a short book on positivism and idealism from 1904 he presented his Neo-Idealist philological position, arguing that language was a dynamic, on-going activity and that its style should be treated as the cornerstone of all linguistic investigation.⁴ Like Warburg he sensed the pitfalls of imitation, strongly warning against conventionalism or too rigid adherence to rules. Vossler insisted on speech’s creative, living dimension, and defined style as individual expression and an act of freedom. His proposal to reform linguistics through this idealistic rubric, taking on a field that by its very nature studied general patterns of language, led to a heated but one-sided argument, and the book left no permanent mark on the field of linguistics. It did serve to delineate a growing divide between linguistics and philology, however, for it resonated with readers of literature as a move away from a positivist critical approach, and an attempt to locate the aesthetic or literary element of writing. Vossler’s treatise inspired a younger generation of Ger-

² RPA, 558.

³ Karl Vossler, *Die philosophischen Grundlagen zum “süssen neuen Stil” des Guido Guinicelli, Guido Cavalcanti und Dante Aligheri* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter’s Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1904). Karl Vossler, *Benvenuto Cellinis Stil in seiner Vita; Versuch einer psychologischen Stilbetrachtung* (Halle a. S.: Niemeyer, 1899).

⁴ Karl Vossler, *Positivismus und Idealismus in der Sprachwissenschaft* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1904).

man and European literary critics,⁵ suggesting an approach to literature that Romance philologists like Erich Auerbach and Leo Spitzer productively expanded.⁶

In a period where linguistics and philology had begun to define themselves as independent fields, and where the systematic studies of Latinate languages pioneered by scholars like Friedrich Diez had helped to institutionalize Romance philology within the German university,⁷ Karl Vossler now pushed language studies in the direction of aesthetics. A young assistant professor at the University of Heidelberg in 1904, he was one of the first to forcefully articulate a stylistic approach to literature, causing an epistemological shift in the field. Warburg, eight years Vossler's senior and a scholar in the much more stylistically oriented field of art history, had studied the concept of style ever since his student days in the 1880s. The term played a key interpretive role in the methodology of the ascendant Vienna School of art history.⁸ Here critics like Alois Riegl explored the structurally, internally motivated evolution of stylistic details, an approach that frustrated the student Warburg as too formalist and aesthetic. Nonetheless, even as Warburg objected to the dominant Viennese, he himself spent decades of research on the question of the stylistic reception of antiquity in the Renaissance.⁹

⁵ Viktor Klemperer and Eugen Lerch, eds., *Idealistische Neuphilologie: Festschrift für Karl Vossler zum 6. September 1922* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1922).

⁶ Erich Auerbach, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur romanischen Philologie* (Bern, Munich: Francke, 1967); Leo Spitzer, *Linguistics and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948). See also Frank-Rutger Hausmann, *Vom Strudel der Ereignisse Verschlungen: Deutsche Romanistik im "Dritten Reich"* (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 2000), 1–29.

⁷ Jürgen Storost, "Die 'neuen Philologien', ihre Institutionen und Periodica," in *History of the Language Sciences: an International Handbook on the Evolution of the Study of Language from the Beginnings to the Present = Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaften: ein internationales Handbuch zur Entwicklung der Sprachforschung von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart = Histoire des sciences du langage: manuel international sur l'évolution de l'étude du langage des origines à nos jours*, ed. Sylvain Auroux (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 1240–71; Pierre Swiggers, "Les debuts et l'évolution de la philologie romane," in Auroux, 2001, 1272–86.

⁸ Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); Willibald Sauerländer, "Alois Riegl und die Entstehung der autonomen Kunstgeschichte am Fin de siècle," in *Fin de Siècle*, ed. Roger Bauer, et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977).

⁹ E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, 2 ed. (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986); Roland Kany, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Forschung an der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg* (Bamberg: Stefen Wendel Verlag, 1989); Ulrich Raulff,

Scientists in a large range of disciplines—anthropology, evolutionary biology, sociology, experimental psychology, and neurology—had begun to explore linguistics as an indispensable component of their own fields.¹⁰ Linguistics also played a growing role in philosophy.¹¹ The moment I explore, when an art historian and a Romance philologist simultaneously but independently used linguistics to reconceptualize the well-established eighteenth and nineteenth-century aesthetic term style, exemplifies their period's optimism about linguistic models. Both Warburg and Vossler tried to stretch disciplinary boundaries by describing the communicative function of art, and both saw the methodological potential of using linguistics to do so. Yet their association of style, as a concept, with the oral properties of expressivity and freedom brought them up against the word's complicated and contradictory set of meanings. Art history had, since Winckelmann, largely ignored style's conflicting implications about historical determinism and the limits of individual agency, and linguistics had, in making its groundbreaking discoveries of the nineteenth century, often bracketed questions of individual expression and free will. Warburg and Vossler's attempts to employ style exposed them to the troubling inconsistencies inherent in this term. Their theoretical work helped to clarify the limitations of linguistic models that future linguists, the structuralists in particular, would later address.¹²

The frustration was not limited to terminology or conceptual frameworks. Vossler and Warburg, although writing independently, shared impatience with the state of their disciplines as well; their essays voice reformist fervor and exhort change. Linguistic analysis of style offered each potential insight into cultural artifacts, but also, when examined more closely, a bitter lesson about artistic conformity. Similarly, their respective fields offered the possibility for groundbreaking, boundary-defying research and its un-

"Nachwort," in Aby Warburg, *Schlangenritual: eine Reisebericht*, ed. Ulrich Raulff (Berlin: K. Wagenbach, 1988), 60–95.

¹⁰ See for example Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1871); John Wesley Powell, "Indian Linguistic Families of America, North of Mexico," *US Bureau of American Ethnology, 7th Annual Report (1885–1886)* (1891); Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie. Eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Sprache, Mythos und Sitte. I. Die Sprache*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1900).

¹¹ Olga Amsterdamska, *Schools of Thought: the Development of Linguistics from Bopp to Saussure* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1987); Lia Formigari, *A History of Language Philosophies* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004).

¹² See Hans Helmut Christmann, *Idealistische Philologie und Moderne Sprachwissenschaft* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1974).

welcome flip side: self-satisfied, conformist and myopic scholarship. Even nineteenth-century historical linguistics itself, the great academic success story of the preceding generation, seemed, on closer inspection, in danger of resting on its laurels, studying minutiae without answering essential questions. In their writings Warburg and Vossler negotiated between the heady enthusiasm for linguistics' explanatory powers and an antagonism to the scientific rigidity of the field.

I. STYLE IN LINGUISTICS

Aby Warburg and Karl Vossler, as scholars of style, read contemporary linguistics with interest. The curiosity was not reciprocal; as a field, nineteenth-century historical linguistics paid little attention to the question of style. "Stylistics" had been named as the subfield of linguistics describing individual expression in textbooks like K.W. L. Heyse's *System der Sprachwissenschaft* (1856) or Heymann Steinthal's *Abriß der Sprachwissenschaft* (1881), yet it was never the main focus of linguistic investigation.¹³ Historical linguists concentrated their energies instead on the task of classifying and reconstructing languages. Especially the Neogrammarian School of Leipzig in the 1870s and 1880s—scholars like Karl Burgmann, Hermann Osthoff, August Leskien, Karl Verner, Hermann Paul, Wilhelm Braune, and Berthold Delbrück—concentrated on modern languages in hypothesizing and verifying the "sound-laws" that explained language change. Their impressive body of work solidified linguistics in Germany as a field of scientific weight and import.¹⁴

Apart from its use in rhetoric and prosody, stylistics, as a modern, twentieth-century subfield of linguistics, developed later. The structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure and his student Charles Bally, as well as the Prague School of linguistics from which came Roman Jakobson's ideas about selection and combination in language production, proved essential to its modern conception.¹⁵ Style as a linguistic category is now often de-

¹³ Jürgen Trabant, "Der Totaleindruck: Stil der Texte und Charakter der Sprachen," in *Stil: Geschichte und Funktionen eines Kulturwissenschaftlichen Diskurselements*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer, and Armin Biermann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 169–88; 69.

¹⁴ See Anna Morpurgo Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, ed. Giulio Lepschy, vol. 4, *History of Linguistics* (London: Longman, 1998).

¹⁵ See for example Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), 350–77.

fined as an act of selection, or at its very core, the possibility of choice and the potential to select from alternatives. (Take for example two recent definitions: “style can be construed as linguistic choice,”¹⁶ or “what makes styles distinctive is the CHOICE of items and their distribution and patterning.”¹⁷) Within the idea of choice, some approaches to style have stressed the role of deviation, defining style as that which departs from the norms of a given language community. Leo Spitzer, in his literary criticism, worked with this model of analysis.¹⁸ More recently, linguists have questioned the assumption that a stable norm exists, and rather emphasized the selection process itself, seeing style as a choice within a set of viable, essentially synonymous alternatives.¹⁹

This second, now most accepted definition of style, reiterates ideas from ancient rhetoric, from which the concept of style initially derived. Classical rhetoricians as early as the fifth century B.C. also worked on the assumption that an orator composed a text by selecting the appropriate word from a set of accepted possible alternatives. This moment of choice, and thus of textual ornamentation, was called elocution or *elocutio*, and was one of five rhetorical steps in composing an oration; style as a rhetorical category is closely linked to this concept.²⁰ The word itself dates back to the Latin *stilus*, initially describing a metal or wooden writing implement and then linked metonymically to a manner of writing or expressing oneself. Thus far before its application in linguistics, style appeared in theories of rhetoric, where it marked a moment of selection, but within a set of stable and strict rules about well-constructed prose.

Aside from its long history in classical rhetoric, style also played a key role in defining the parameters of modern art history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Art historians have been quick to point out how ill suited the rhetorical term was to its task—both Winckelmann and Hegel used it to describe the rise and decline of whole artistic periods, countries,

¹⁶ M. Short, “Style,” in *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, ed. R. E. Asher (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994), 4375. See also P. Verdonk, “Style,” in *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics Second Edition*, ed. Keith Brown (Amsterdam, London: Elsevier, 2006), 196–210.

¹⁷ Katie Wales, “Style,” in *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (Harlow, New York: Longman, 2001), 436.

¹⁸ See for example Leo Spitzer, *Romanische Stil- und Literaturstudien. II* (Marburg: Elwert, 1931).

¹⁹ See Karl-Heinz Göttert and Oliver Jungen, *Einführung in die Stilistik* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2004), 21ff.

²⁰ Joachim Knappe, “Elocutio,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gerd Ueding (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1994), 1022–83.

and cultures. (Ernst Gombrich, impatient with Hegelian models, reminds us that style was “a doctrine of *decorum*,” fitting the words to the appropriate occasion;²¹ Willibald Sauerländer, who dates style’s art historical origins to Winckelmann, insists we remember that the term “took shape first in the framework of a system of classification, dominated by norms, rules, pre-scripts and even interdictions.”²²) Only with Romanticism did style come to be generally associated with originality and individual expression.²³ This modern meaning reemphasizes the idea of freedom and choice, and here important twentieth-century art historical definitions of style dovetail with those of linguistics. Gombrich agrees with the linguist Stephen Ullmann’s thesis that “there can be no question of style unless the speaker or writer has the possibility of choosing between alternative forms of expression.”²⁴ Meyer Schapiro, writing as a scholar of Modernism’s stylistic plentitude, argues that style’s “heterogeneity . . . may be regarded as a necessary and valuable consequence of the individual’s freedom of choice”²⁵ Each emphasizes not only the process of selection, but also the individualistic nature of that choice. Their definitions thus approach the idea of style as the deviation from a norm. As we will see in the case of Warburg and Vossler, the concept of style as individualistic deviation rather than rule-bound selection would prove to be a powerful, unspoken assumption but a problematic, unstable working definition as well.

A final similarity between modern definitions of style, be they art historical, linguistics or philosophical, is critics’ insistence on style’s inherent opacity and difficulty. “The further the concept of style is investigated, the more it appears as an inherently partly incoherent concept. . . .”²⁶ “There

²¹ E. H. Gombrich, “Style,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Cromwell Collier and MacMillan, Inc, 1968), 354.

²² Willibald Sauerländer, “From Stilus to Style: Reflections on the Fate of a Notion,” *Art History* 6, no. 3 (1983): 255.

²³ See also Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Stil,” in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft: Neubearbeitung des Reallexikons der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, ed. Klaus Weimar (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003); Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer, and Armin Biermann, *Stil: Geschichten und Funktionen eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Diskurselements*, 1. Aufl. ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986); Rudolf Heinz, *Stil als geisteswissenschaftliche Kategorie: Problemgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Stilbegriff im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Königshausen + Neumann, 1986); W.G. Müller, “Stil,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995).

²⁴ Gombrich, “Style,” 353.

²⁵ Meyer Schapiro, “Style,” in *Aesthetics Today*, ed. Morris Philipson (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961), 91.

²⁶ In James Elkins, “Style,” in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner (London: MacMillan Publishers, 1996).

exist comparatively few such abstract terms in the field of linguistics and literary history”²⁷ “Stylistics is an unfortunate field, born under the sign of a paradox.”²⁸ Recent definitions differ in spirit from those of the early twentieth century. There one hears great optimism about the explanatory power of the term style, within both the field of language and the visual arts. As we will see in the cases of Aby Warburg and Karl Vossler, their optimism coincided with the hope that the theory of suppletion, introduced by the linguist Hermann Osthoff, would help explain the complex process of style formation.

II. WARBURG ON SUPPLETION

The drawing Aby Warburg presented to the Philological Society, depicting Orpheus’ death at the hands of maenads, dates from 1494, the year that Dürer first began to depict classical subjects and study Italian artists. The drawing can be found in Hamburg’s Kunsthalle, where Warburg was able to study it at length. It is believed to be modeled on a work by Mantegna now lost, but an anonymous engraving, attributed to the School of Mantegna, and also owned by the Kunsthalle, shows the same scene, providing a copy of the original source. Warburg proposed to discuss both pieces, thus from the very onset addressing not only style but also imitation. The published article, “Dürer and Italian Antiquity,” is a short version of Warburg’s much longer lecture. In a paper about gestures and expression, Warburg began with his own gesture of magnanimity by donating the large poster board of his illustrations to the Philological Society he addressed. And with equal diplomacy, he appealed to his audience’s philological expertise, a canny strategic move, as he prepared them for his linguistic analytic approach.

Linguistics enters into Warburg’s Dürer essay in a number of ways. One is struck perhaps first by the prevalence of metaphors of speech in Warburg’s own prose. Style, in his analysis, becomes a means of fluent communication; the artists he describes do not so much draw as speak, and they

²⁷ “Es gibt verhältnismäßig wenige abstrakte Begriffe im Bereich der Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaftlern. . . .” In Bernhard Sowinski, *Stilistik, Sammlung Metzler* 263, 2nd ed, (Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 1999), 1.

²⁸ G. Antoine: “La stylistique est une discipline malchanceuse, née sous le signe d’un paradoxe. . . .” “Stylistique” in André Jacob, Sylvain Auroux, and Jean-François Mattéi, *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989).

hear and speak a language they have excavated or reconstructed. Warburg discusses a number of other copies of the Orpheus myth as points of comparison. A 1497 Venetian woodcut, also illustrating Orpheus's murder, resounds with "The true voice of antiquity, which the Renaissance knew well."²⁹ While the Florentine artists, Warburg writes, with Poliziano as model, express themselves in a "mixed style," Antonio Pollaiuolo orates excessively through his "exuberant rhetoric of muscles."³⁰ In contrast, Albrecht Dürer, even when imitating the Italians and thus speaking in lively southern pagan tones, instinctively modulates his voice, giving his classical gesticulating figures what Warburg terms an "overtone . . . of quiet resistance."³¹ The languages of the visual arts and poetry are interchangeable as well. In Warburg's analysis, the Venetian woodcut speaks the same language as Poliziano's drama *Orfeo*, first performed in Mantua in 1472; he notes the play's "emphatic accent" and conflates the two media, writing of their shared attempt, "[to bring] true, antique formulas of intensified physical or psychic expression into the Renaissance style of depicting life in motion."³²

Warburg writes of "antique formulas," and later of "emotive formula," or *Pathosformel*. In his Dürer essay he first coined this well-known term; *Pathosformel* refers to the gestures of extreme emotion that artists, in this case of the Italian Renaissance, adopted like a language, relying on a handful of set poses to denote states of emotion universally understood by their audiences. Warburg's aim is to trace the motion of anguish the cowering Orpheus makes back to its classical roots. He analyzes art as a language of gestures, emphasizing its deeply communal and communicative nature. One example of its communicative function is the story of the Romans who first discovered a small copy of the *Laocoön* statue in 1488, before discovering the statue itself in 1506. In Warburg's account the excavators literally heard a familiar language. He writes: "This was the Vulgar Latin of emotive gesture: an international, indeed a universal language that went straight to the hearts. . . ."³³ The passionate gestures of the *Laocoön*, even in miniature, enabled communication and were easily understood. *Pathosformel*, Warburg's neologism, functions like a language and can be read as a linguistic principle. Gertrude Bing, in a retrospective essay on Warburg,

²⁹ RPA, 555.

³⁰ RPA, 555.

³¹ My translation. "Oberton ruhige[n] Widerstand[es]." GS, 448.

³² RPA, 555.

³³ RPA, 558.

suggests as much, observing that Warburg, with his interest in the repetition of gestures, worked almost like a grammarian pointing out tropes or figures of speech.³⁴

With *Pathosformel* Warburg introduced a linguistically loaded term to his philologically receptive audience. He presented them with additional linguistic concepts as well. The first, as mentioned, was his suggestion that visual images could be analyzed like a reconstructed historical grammar. Quite remarkably, he was able to trace each figure he described back to an ancient gesturing model. He identified Renaissance images of Orpheus with the dual classical depictions of Orpheus and Pentheus. If he could not find a definitive source for a gesture, he hypothesized one, much like the asterisk next to a root word in a linguistic textbook. At the same time, Warburg stressed that the central question was not the identification but the patterns of transmission, suggesting, in his conclusion, that art history study the migration of formulas, spreading across continents like Indo-European languages.

The second linguistic argument had to do with the surprising word “superlative” Warburg used in his conclusion. He spoke there of the “antique superlatives of gesture” that traveled back to Nuremberg and Dürer. Already earlier in the essay he writes of the comparative or superlative forms, using equivalent terminology when he refers to the “intensified facial expressions”³⁵ and “antique formula of intensified bodies.”³⁶ Warburg’s dissertation on Botticelli had investigated moments of heightened movement achieved somewhat artificially through windswept fabrics and hair. His essay here investigates the representation of intensified, superlative inner emotional states. These extreme moments, Warburg believed, communicate importantly between artist and audience over diverse generations. In thinking about this ability to skip generations, Warburg in fact had a specific linguistic model in mind. That was Hermann Osthoff’s theory of suppletion.

Warburg first read about Hermann Osthoff’s essay, “On Suppletion in Indo-Germanic Languages,”³⁷ when the linguist delivered it as the Karl

³⁴ Gertrude Bing, “A. M. Warburg (1965)” in Aby Warburg, *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, ed. Dieter Wuttke and Carl Georg Heise, 2., verbesserte ed. (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1980), 444 and 48.

³⁵ “gesteigerte Mimik” GS 445 (my translation).

³⁶ “antike Formel gesteigerter Körper” GS 447 (my translation).

³⁷ Hermann Osthoff, *Vom Suppletivwesen der indogermanischen Sprachen* (Heidelberg: J. Hörning, 1899).

Friedrich Akademische Rede in Heidelberg on November 22, 1899. Warburg's copy of the speech, in the Warburg Institute library in London, includes a newspaper article from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* about the talk, which he clipped and pasted into the offprint. The speech was a technical talk on the patterns of irregularities in stems of words, but Osthoff's model must have attracted Warburg because it offered a vision of surprising moments of linguistic freedom, of springing from shackles.

Osthoff's paper coins the term "suppletion" by pointing out that certain related sets of words throughout Indo-European languages display unrelated, or, as it were, supplanted, roots. With amazing regularity this is true of the comparative and superlative, as in *good, better, best* or the Latin *bonus, melior, optimus*. It is also true in the declension of the most commonly used verbs: to carry in Latin *fero—tuli*, or in English the irregular *to go* but *I went*. Irregularity also holds true in the feminine construction of certain words. Whereas most nouns rely on feminine endings to indicate gender, pairs like *father, mother, sister*, and *brother* are almost universally unrelated. Although grammarians had noted these discrepancies Osthoff was the first to group them into a specific category and look for their cause. His answer was psychological: these words described objects or states very close and familiar to the speaker and therefore had undergone a process of individualization.

... objects of one's imagined world are perceived that much more sharply and individually the closer they stand to the feelings and thoughts of the speaker and the more intensively and vividly they thus usually touch the mind.³⁸

Osthoff's answer thus emphasizes the immediacy and individuality of the language user. At the same time, the kinds of words vulnerable to suppletion are themselves often energetic or immediate, either in the superlative form, or as strong verbs of action. These two categories particularly attracted Warburg's attention, as we can see through some of his unpublished writings. Warburg collected a large number of note card boxes with bibliographic information throughout his career. Among the notes in Box 52, labeled "Literature," we find a sub-heading "Linguistics General." Hermann Osthoff's suppletion treatise gets a card, on which Warburg wrote some of the verbs of action Osthoff discusses: "essen, geben, gehen, laufen, nehmen/ tragen, bringen, legen, schlafen, sehen, sein/ werden" ("eat, give,

³⁸ Osthoff, 42.

go, run, take/carry, bring, lay, sleep, see, be/ become").³⁹ One could speculate that these active verbs helped trigger Warburg's thinking about *Pathos-formel*, conceptualizing recurrent strong gestures of action in visual representation. Because none of the notes in Warburg's note boxes are dated, it is impossible to say at what point he jotted these verbs down, yet we know that Warburg had clipped the newspaper article from 1899, and that he returned to Osthoff several years later, at the time he began working on the Dürer essay. Gombrich uses Warburg's *Diary* to identify November 19, 1903, as a day when he read Osthoff.⁴⁰

During this time Warburg read other linguists as well. On the same Osthoff note card Warburg wrote to himself: "Compare [Georg] Curtius and [Heymann] Steinthal". Curtius (1820–85) was a leading classical philologist at Leipzig, and professor to many of those who would form the Neogrammarian School of linguistics (although he strongly criticized some of their work). Heymann Steinthal (1823–99) was a philologist and founder, with Moritz Lazarus, of the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, to which Warburg subscribed. Among the surrounding note cards under the subheading "Linguistics General" of Box 52, we find that Warburg made bibliographical notes on Curtius and Steinthal's writings. He filled out note cards with information about other contemporary linguists as well, though again it is difficult to date them precisely. He took notes on Hermann Paul's *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte* (1880), and wrote down bibliographic information for Karl Brugmann's *Grundriß der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen* (1886–93), Georg Gabelentz's *Die Sprachwissenschaft, ihre Aufgaben, Methoden und bisherigen Ergebnisse* (1891), Friedrich Müller's *Grundriß der Sprachwissenschaft* (1876–88), and Heymann Steinthal's *Charakteristik der hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues* (1850).

Hermann Osthoff's essay on suppletion proved especially fruitful, though. At the same time, between 1903 and 1906, that Warburg wrote his lecture on Dürer he also worked on an unfinished, unpublished manuscript entitled *Festwesen*. Trying to explain why the Italian painter Ghirlandaio had borrowed the look and gestures of Hugo van der Goes's devout Flemish shepherds for his painting *Adoration*, Warburg speculated on Osthoff's principle of suppletion. He writes:

I do not want to overrate the formula I have found for it, but there exists in the field of the visual arts a phenomenon, which is the

³⁹ Warburg Institute Archives, London, *Notizkästen* 52, note 052–029091.

⁴⁰ Gombrich, Warburg, 178.

same as the one Osthoff has observed in linguistics—a switch and supplementation of the roots used in the superlative.⁴¹

Here Warburg focuses on the superlative in particular, as a site of energetic reanimation in both word and image. This is the word he would emphasize in his Orpheus essay, writing of Dürer's "antique superlatives of gesture." In retrospect Warburg recognized suppletion even more broadly, and placed special importance on Osthoff's linguistic theory of intensification. In a draft of an introduction to his unfinished final project, the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, written between 1928–29, Warburg recalled, "Already in 1905 the paper of Osthoff's had come to the aid of the author."⁴² He continued, "He proved extensively that in the case of adjectives and verbs the introduction of a foreign root word brings about the intensification of the original meaning." Warburg then makes the connection to art theory:

Mutatis mutandis a similar problem can be formulated in the field of the language of artistically depicted gestures, when for example a dancing *Salome* from the Bible appears like a Greek maenad or Ghirlandaio's fruitbasket-bearing servant girl rushes forth in the style of a consciously imitated Victoria from a Roman triumphal arch.⁴³

Gestures work like a language, Warburg insists here, giving an example from Ghirlandaio's *Birth of St. John the Baptist*, a Florentine fresco that had fascinated him since his student days. The introduction of foreign stems—in this case the motif of a nymph-like, running girl visually foreign to a medieval style—explained the intensification that Warburg continued to associate with early Renaissance style.

The energy comes not just from the strong action—running—or its superlative, intensified nature, but also from the supplementation and substitution itself. Warburg admires Ghirlandaio's stylistic innovation precisely because it was unique, an individual choice, or, one could argue, a

⁴¹ "Ich will die Formel, die ich dafür gefunden habe, nicht überschätzen, aber es gibt eben auf dem Gebiete der bildenden Kunst, wie Osthoff auf sprachlichem Gebiet betrachtet hat, ein Suppletivwesen, ein Austausch- und Ersatzwesen der superlativen Formen." Gombrich, *Warburg*, 178–79.

⁴² Aby M. Warburg, "Einleitung zum Mnemosyne-Atlas," in Isebill Barta Fliedl and Christoph Geissmar, eds., *Die Beredsamkeit des Leibes. Zur Körpersprache in der Kunst* (Salzburg: Residenz-Verlag, 1992), 171. My translation.

⁴³ Ibid.

deviation from a norm. His reading of Osthoff's suppletion reinforces this definition of style as deviation. And yet even as Warburg found in linguistics a model to describe individualistic stylistic intensity, he simultaneously came upon style's rhetorical and linguistic meaning of rule-bound conventions. He observes repeatedly that Italian Renaissance artists quickly degenerated into a baroque style, the classical gestures they appropriated becoming mannered and conventional. Salvatore Settis has analyzed the contradictory combination of ideas in Warburg's neologism *Pathosformel*, between spontaneous passion and the formulaic,⁴⁴ and this tension seems evident in Warburg's negative assessment of the Italian artists. Indeed, the word *Pathosformel* encapsulates the same tension found in the concept of style itself; a strained reciprocal relationship between individual expression and prescribed rules.

Osthoff's theory of suppletion could not, ultimately, explain away this normalizing pattern of stylistic change. Artists of the Italian Renaissance may have broken their medieval shackles and found new means of representation, but they still operated within a preexisting vocabulary. With his theory of *Pathosformel*, Warburg ends up describing style as a matter of selection within a set pool of emotive formulas; Mantegna and Pollaiuolo chose classical formulas, yet these too were in danger of becoming trite and overused. Albrecht Dürer, to be sure, emerges in the essay as a stylistic counterexample, a triumph of individual choices over norms and conventions. Warburg quotes from Dürer's letters, showing how in 1506 Dürer consciously turned away from the Italianate conventions by writing: "And the thing that pleased me so well eleven years ago pleases me no longer."⁴⁵ And yet Dürer seems the exception within a world caught up in stylistic imitation, reappropriation and supplementation.

Warburg's surprisingly vehement critique of the Italians, his dissatisfaction with their mannerism, reflects a larger disappointment with style as a communicative medium in general, or rather, with its tendency to lose intensity and become complacently conventional. And here it is worth noting that his frustration seeps into his assessment of his fellow scholars as well. In his conclusion he warns against the formulaic thinking of modern art historians, calling on them to desist from their single-artist studies, their "hero-worshipping dilettantism"⁴⁶ and to attend to the larger, pressing

⁴⁴ Salvatore Settis, "Pathos und Ethos, Morphologie und Funktion," *Vorträge aus dem Warburg-Haus* 1 (1997).

⁴⁵ RPA, 556. "Und das Ding, das mir vor eilf Jahren so wol hat gefallen, das gefällt mir itz nüt mehr." GS, 448.

⁴⁶ RPA, 558.

question of the migration of visual formulae. The question he poses about migration and a “psychology of style” is, he explains, wide-ranging, yet barely formulated, and difficult to articulate among his conservative, rule-bound colleagues. He insists, with rhetorical urgency, on a new direction in art history. Osthoff’s theory of suppletion, as an exemplary text underpinning Warburg’s concept of *Pathosformel*, had demonstrated to him that art could be analyzed with linguistic tools. And this precisely because Warburg understood visual images to be immediate and pressing in their wish to communicate, attempting, within the constraints of a limited visual vocabulary, to make themselves heard.

III. VOSSLER AND IDEALISM

At the time that Warburg was using Osthoff to develop a theory of *Pathosformel*, a German Romance language scholar inspired by the philosophy of his Italian friend Benedetto Croce was reading Hermann Osthoff’s essay as well. In Karl Vossler’s polemical tract on linguistics written in 1904, *Positivism and Idealism*, he announces that

The relation between inflectional change, or rather between morphology and mental intuition is the subject of Hermann Osthoff’s penetrating comparative study, to which he has given the odd self-styled title “On Suppletion in Indo-Germanic languages.”⁴⁷

Karl Vossler, in 1904 a thirty-two year old assistant professor teaching beginning Italian language classes at the University of Heidelberg in a department top-heavy with distinguished French professors, had not strictly trained as a linguist.⁴⁸ Vossler had studied German philology and Romance

⁴⁷ “Die Beziehungen zwischen flexivischem Wandel, resp. zwischen Wortbildung und geistiger Intuition sind von Hermann Osthoff zum Gegenstand einer eindringenden sprachvergleichenden Studie gemacht worden, die er mit merkwürdigem selbstgeschaffenem Terminus ‘vom Suppletivwesen der indogermanischen Sprachen’ betitelte.” 30.

⁴⁸ Ernst Gamillscheg, “Karl Vossler,” in *Portraits of Linguists: a Biographical Source Book for the History of Western Linguistics, 1746–1963*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 334–37. Hans Helmut Christmann, “Im Mittelpunkt der deutschen Romanistik seiner Zeit: Karl Vossler,” in *Offene Gefüge: Literatursystem und Lebenswirklichkeit. Festschrift für Fritz Nies zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Henning Krauß (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1994). Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Vom Leben und Sterben der grossen Romanisten: Karl Vossler, Ernst Robert Curtius, Leo Spitzer, Erich Auerbach, Werner Krauss* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2002).

languages at the universities of Tübingen, Heidelberg, Strasbourg, Geneva, and Rome. In Rome in 1895 he had first befriended the already renowned philosopher and critic Benedetto Croce. Croce's *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistics in General* (1902) deeply impressed Vossler, and as his foreword to *Positivismus und Idealismus* makes clear, he hoped to apply Croce's philosophy of language directly to the field of linguistics.

Although he had not read Warburg, Vossler's definition of style overlapped quite markedly with Warburg's definition of art. Warburg used the metaphors of speaking and articulation in discussing visual images, and Vossler, in his turn, insisted on the immediate, oral quality of style. He defined the word as "individual spiritual expression."⁴⁹ Just like spoken language, style was creative and spontaneous. He emphasized its individualistic character, taking the meaning far from a simple principle of selection among equivalences. Indeed Vossler could not countenance the idea of synonyms at all: language was too varied, nuanced and flexible for true synonyms to exist; the word itself was an unscientific concept.⁵⁰ Similarly misguided, according to Vossler, was the concept of linguistic conventions, those rules that held together a language community. Certainly people, in communicating with each other, relied on self-regulated rules, but rather than describe these as passive normative language practices, Vossler suggested speaking of an active communal giftedness with languages.⁵¹ Thus his definition of style radically excluded the possibility of conventions or language formulas.

By insisting that linguistics be analyzed through its stylistic building blocks, Vossler moved the field into the realm of aesthetics. It was a consciously combative gesture; in a typical aside Vossler remarks: "When philologists at the very sound of the word aesthetic cross themselves, they are thinking of the old, dogmatic rather than the new, critical aesthetics."⁵² This new aesthetics referred especially to Croce's philosophy of language (which, some have noted, had little to do with the actual linguistics of his time).⁵³ Vossler's aesthetic philology also built upon earlier philosophies of language. He deeply admired Wilhelm von Humboldt and his insistence

⁴⁹ "Stil = geistiger Ausdruck." Vossler, 16.

⁵⁰ Vossler, 27.

⁵¹ Vossler, 37.

⁵² Vossler, 42.

⁵³ Giacomo Devoto, "Vossler und Croce: Ein Kapitel aus der Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft," *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse: Sitzungsberichte* 1 (1968): 3–26.

that language is not a thing (*ergon*) but an action or energy (*energeia*). He respected Hugo Schuchart, an Austrian Romance language scholar blasting invectives from Graz at the dominant Leipzig school of the Neogrammarians. In *Positivism*, he praised his former Romance philology professor from Geneva, Gustav Gröber, for sharing the same sensitivity to language as Hermann Osthoff, working intuitively rather than in a reductively scientific manner.⁵⁴

Vossler also praised Osthoff himself.⁵⁵ Vossler admired Osthoff's thesis for the same reason Warburg did: it showed how language irregularities reveal the psychological closeness that a speaker feels towards certain objects, and how this psychological factor works against language's regularizing tendency. Like Gröber, Vossler notes, Osthoff recognized two trends in language creation: one towards organization, rationalization, and categorization, and the other towards individualization and personalization. Suppletion is an example of the latter, in which personal, irregular words supplant those that one would logically, and morphologically anticipate. These two categories, it should be noted—organization and individual expression—are the same two poles that coexist so uncomfortably in Warburg's neologism *Pathosformel*.

Vossler accused the positivists of recognizing only the first organizational tendency. Their methodology in itself precluded any insights into individual expression: Vossler criticized them as mere systematizers, amassing material as a goal in itself, treating language production mechanically, and bloodlessly dissecting it into various subcategories of phonetics, morphology and syntax. With a gothic image he portrays positivist linguistics as a cemetery:

This entire field of grammatical disciplines is an immense graveyard laid out by tireless positivists where all kinds of dead parts of speech are tidily bedded in mass or single graves, and the graves are provided with labels and numbers. Who has not experienced the musty odor of this positivist philology constricting his chest!⁵⁶

The idealists, on the other hand, never lost sight of language's organic wholeness, and never forgot that subcategories were artificially imposed heuristic tools.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Vossler, 33.

⁵⁵ Vossler, 30–32.

⁵⁶ Vossler, 38.

⁵⁷ On positivism in linguistics see Iorgu Iordan, *An Introduction to Romance Linguistics*, trans. J. Orr (London: Methuen, 1937), 86–76. On positivism as a general pejorative

Although Vossler never names them, the positivists under fire in his polemic were clearly the Neogrammarians, the dominant school of linguistics at the turn of the century. It may have seemed odd, then, that Vossler included Osthoff on the side of the angels. In 1878 the Neogrammarian movement had staked out its territory with its own controversial, polemical manifesto, the introduction to a new journal, *Morphologische Untersuchungen*. Though probably written by the linguist Karl Brugmann, it was co-signed by Osthoff, then a newly appointed professor at Heidelberg.⁵⁸ Osthoff continued to be associated with the Neogrammarians and went on to have a successful career as an Indo-Europeanist. He had been named full professor of Sanskrit and comparative linguistics at the University of Heidelberg in 1877. In 1885 he was named dean, and in 1899, the year when he presented the university speech on suppletion that Warburg read, Osthoff was named president of the university. Karl Vossler had begun teaching at Heidelberg in the summer semester of 1899, and most likely first heard the monograph he would later praise in person.

Vossler was in any case on friendly terms with the university's president. From the six extant postcards from Osthoff in Vossler's Nachlass,⁵⁹ we learn that in 1902 Osthoff read a Dante essay of Vossler's with great pleasure, that in March of 1903 he looked forward to meeting his younger colleague in Rome, and that on November 24, 1904 he had already skimmed through Vossler's positivism book. He writes that he appreciated the fresh thought Vossler brought to the problem, hopes when he finished reading that they could discuss it more extensively in person, and thanked his colleague especially for his kind words about suppletion. In his sixth and last postcard, November 19, 1906, Osthoff would distance himself from Vossler's idealistic position, thanking him for a book review of a book by Schuchard but stating that he did not agree with Vossler's main points.

Perhaps on a first cursory reading Osthoff did not appreciate the extent to which Vossler had the Neogrammarians squarely in his sights. Nor did he notice the irony that Vossler, while praising Osthoff for avoiding dualism, himself divided scholarship into two such radically distinct camps: the creative, insightful idealists and the plodding, systematizing positivists. With rhetorical heat, Vossler systematically attacked the platform of the

term see Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 300–301.

⁵⁸ K[arl] Brugmann, "Hermann Osthoff (1847–1909)," in *Portraits of Linguists: A Biographical Source Book for the History of Western Linguistics, 1746–1963*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 555–62.

⁵⁹ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München. Handschriftenabteilung, Ana 350, 12A.

Neogrammarians, addressing first inflection, syntax and semantics, which, he argued, change as much through cultural pressures as through internal pressures of grammar. He then moved on to phonetics, and the Neogrammarians' sound laws.

The 1878 Neogrammarian manifesto signed by Brugmann and Osthoff had asserted two defining laws that had by 1904 proven extremely productive and highly contentious. It introduced the "Neogrammarian hypothesis" of the regularity of sound change, proposing that a diachronic sound change simultaneously affected all words in which its environment was met, without exception. It emphasized, secondly, the importance of analogy in affecting language change.

In *Positivismus* Vossler opened a full-frontal attack on these Neogrammarian strongholds, beginning:

Admittedly, the positivist method brought itself, comparatively, furthest in the case of phonetics, but precisely here it has made the most stubborn and hidden mistakes: above all the cardinal mistake, that "sound-laws" exist.⁶⁰

The laws of sound change were a cardinal mistake because they contradicted the very basis of Vossler's philosophy of language: they negated the idea of free will. He found it impossible to imagine a language that would change mechanically, without exception. His aim was instead to show the close causal connection between style development and sound change.⁶¹ Like Warburg, frustrated with the conventionalism of "hero-worshipping" art historians, Vossler let his impatience with the passivity these laws assumed spill over into his critique of the positivist Neogrammarians. He accused them of monotony, conventionality, cowardliness and impotence, and, at their worst, death. Stressing the importance of free will, Vossler grew increasingly politicized at the end of his monograph. The grammatical laws (*Lautgesetze*) morphed into tyrannical interdictions, and he called on the reader to fight them in the name of freedom: "Even in the poorest, lowliest human being there still lives the divine spark of an individual and free speech. No rule or convention in the world can crush it."⁶²

Nonetheless, at the end of his essay Vossler also concedes that linguistics must in part study language communities, systems, and rules. He re-

⁶⁰ Vossler, 47.

⁶¹ Vossler, 92.

⁶² Vossler, 98.

turns to the two language poles Osthoff had laid out in his study of suppletion, the systematizing and the individualistic. Vossler considers the case of writing. Anyone who had seriously, conscientiously tried to communicate and express himself, he observed, would have struggled with intractable conventions and the inadequacy of language.⁶³ Much as Warburg imagined Albrecht Dürer struggling to find a new way to express himself in images, Vossler describes writing as a continual struggle against the formulaic and prefabricated. His key point, though, is idealistic: that the struggle continues, language always remains active, potentially free, and, as such, stylistically creative. He thus reiterates the concept of style as innovation, rather than as a process of selection.

Vossler hoped, with the help of Osthoff's energetic idea of suppletion, to disprove the exceptionless regularity of the Neogrammarian laws of sound change. He also, like Warburg, saw in suppletion a window into the dynamic act of style formation. Both scholars wanted to characterize the immediate, active nature of expression, and to find the psychological, emotional explanation for style's development. Style meant for both a choice, and a conscious deviation from the normative. Linguistics promised to pinpoint this dynamic. Yet language, including the language of images and gestures, proved more complex, exhibiting both an individualistic and a standardizing, repetitive tendency. Style formation, they found, took place within a language community, whose members struggled with the pressures to communicate: with reception, reformulation and imitation. In other words, style struggled against its always-limited vocabulary, and proved to be as much a question of selection between inadequate equivalences as about exceptionalism.

Neither Warburg nor Vossler abandoned his interest in style in later essays, or his study of linguistics. Warburg continued to study the stylistic reception of classical art in the Italian Renaissance. His last unfinished project, the *Mnemosyne Atlas*,⁶⁴ was intended to collect and trace the history of select images from antiquity to the modern day, much like an atlas of linguistic change. Working with images, many of which he had studied since his student days, Warburg returned to Osthoff in drafts of his introduction, still intrigued with suppletion as a possible explanation for shifts in the history of visual style. Vossler's heated polemic put him on the map as a philological champion of aesthetics. He continued to write about the phi-

⁶³ Vossler, 90.

⁶⁴ Aby Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, ed. Martin Warnke and Claudia Brink, vol. 2, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000).

losophy of language,⁶⁵ but he is best known for his stylistically sensitive literary studies that inspired a younger generation of German Romance philologists to pursue stylistic analysis. In later years he distanced himself from his early idealistic pronouncements. Vossler's work on the French Enlightenment and Classicism, or on the Spanish baroque and quietism, tended to focus on periods with rigid aesthetic norms and conventions. Rather than study stylistic individualism, they explored the valuable pressures of normative rules in producing literature.⁶⁶

Although Vossler and Warburg had not known each other at the time they first wrote about Osthoff's theory of suppletion, they met in 1928 when Vossler spoke at the Warburg Institute in Hamburg.⁶⁷ The talk, as Warburg's diary attests, was a great success: the two seem to have taken an immediate liking to each other.⁶⁸ This hardly seems surprising, considering how similar the scholars sounded in their early theoretical works on style. Vossler's tone is more inflammatory, idealistic and political, and yet his description of writers struggling with language overlaps with Warburg's imagery of artists struggling against the dictates of formulas—of Albrecht Dürer, resisting the too dominant classical *Pathosformeln* of his Italian contemporaries. Warburg sees the glass as half empty, describing how the artist must fight ineffectively against the powerful conventions of his culture. Vossler views the glass as half full, idealizing the heroism of the fight itself. Yet they share sympathy for the perils of individualistic expression.

The youthful frustration that Vossler articulated, the gesture of youthful re-engagement that a forty-year-old Warburg made in goading on his colleagues reflect both the dynamics of their subject matter—style formation and Osthoff's theory of suppletion—and their relationships to their respective disciplines. Language, and the language of style had revealed itself to be as much a phenomenon of entrenchment, conventionalism and conformity as of freedom and individuality. The struggle each identified within the concept mirrored a struggle each saw within his own field. Here their new ideas—their calls to analyze the visual arts in terms of linguistics

⁶⁵ Karl Vossler, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sprachphilosophie* (Munich: Max Hueber, 1923).

⁶⁶ Karl Vossler, *Jean Racine* (München: Max Hueber, 1926); Karl Vossler, *La Fontaine und sein Fabelwerk* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1919); Karl Vossler, *Poesie der Einsamkeit in Spanien*, 2 ed. (Munich: Beck, 1940).

⁶⁷ Karl Vossler, "Die Antike und die Bühnendichtung der Romanen," *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg, 1926–1927* (1930).

⁶⁸ Aby Warburg, Gertrud Bing, and Fritz Saxl, *Tagebuch der kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg*, ed. Karen Michels and Charlotte Schoell-Glass, vol. 7, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 261.

or to introduce aesthetics into the science of language—were treated by more established colleagues as irregularities themselves, initially met with stubborn indifference. It seems small wonder, in the end, that the heat from their stylistic claims would kindle sparks to ignite their methodological pronouncements.

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The Unity of Physics and Poetry: H. C. Ørsted and the Aesthetics of Force

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INTRODUCTION

A new era in the history of science began in the summer of 1820 when Hans Christian Ørsted announced his discovery of electromagnetism. In the attempt to understand the conceptual underpinnings of Ørsted's discovery, historians have generally believed that he was guided by a steadfast commitment to a force-based ontology inspired by Kant's dynamical theory of matter, which led him, in turn, to conceive of physical phenomena such as electricity, galvanism, magnetism, heat, and light as effects of force-based causes.¹ As such, scholars have believed that Ørsted pursued his experimental work within a well-defined theoretical framework that provided him with coherent metaphysically grounded explanations of physical phenomena, even if the explanations were ultimately flawed. By approaching the foundations of Ørsted's science from this perspective, scholars have therefore naturally assumed that the conceptual term "force" (*Kraft*) in Ørsted's scientific writings functioned as a purely theoretical term, which referred to

¹ See, e.g., Kristine Meyer, "The Scientific Life and Works of H. C. Ørsted," in H. C. Ørsted, *Naturvidenskabelige Skrifter*, ed. Kristine Meyer (Copenhagen: Andr. Fred. Hølst & Søn, 1920), 1: xiii-clxvi; L. Pearce Williams, *The Origins of Field Theory* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980); and H. A. M. Snelders, "Oersted's Discovery of Electromagnetism," in *Romanticism and the Sciences*, eds. Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 228–40.

a well-defined unobservable entity as the underlying ontological and causal ground of physical phenomena.

There have been two prominent dissenting voices regarding both the clarity and directness of Ørsted's use of "force" as a theoretical term in his scientific thought. In 1973, Barry Gower argued that Ørsted "involved himself in conceptual confusions, particularly with regard to force, which vitiated much of his work."² For Gower,

Ørsted's inability to decide whether forces are peculiar properties of matter or whether they are supra-sensible non-spatial entities causally responsible for the existence of matter shows clearly that the tortuous abstractness of Kantian and post-Kantian metaphysics was capable of defeating even those scientists who believed that a conceptual analysis of the foundations of science was of the utmost importance.³

Thus, in Gower's view, Ørsted was undone as a theoretician by an overpowering and implicitly destructive metaphysics. More recently, Kenneth Caneva has also challenged the standard view of the coherence of the conceptual foundations of Ørsted's scientific thought. According to Caneva, Ørsted's science suffered from theoretical uncertainty as a result of general conceptual confusion and what he has described as ontological wavering and "fudging."⁴ According to Caneva, Ørsted "never succeeded either in settling upon a fixed and coherent terminology or in clearly defining the fundamental concepts that might be captured by consistently deployed terms."⁵ Thus, in regard specifically to "force," Caneva has asserted that "it is not safe to assume that he ever held clear and unified concepts associated with [it] and related terms."⁶ In the absence of conceptual and terminological coherence, Ørsted therefore never achieved "a clear and consistent formulation" in regard to "the formal relationship among the forces and activities of nature" or in regard "to their ontological status."⁷

Like the conclusion reached by more sympathetic readers of Ørsted,

² Barry Gower, "Speculation in Physics: The Theory and Practice of *Naturphilosophie*," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 3 (1973): 348.

³ Gower, "Speculation," 341.

⁴ Kenneth L. Caneva, "Colding, Ørsted, and the Meanings of Force," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 28 (1997): 62; see also 55, 76–77, 98.

⁵ Caneva, "Colding," 83.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

the conclusion drawn by Gower and Caneva that Ørsted was a conceptually confused thinker has been based on the assumption that he attempted to employ pure theoretical terms and concepts in his science to provide metaphysically grounded causal explanations of observable phenomena. Gower and Caneva just happen to believe that Ørsted wasn't very skilled in doing so. Contrary to other Ørsted scholars, though, their work has shown that interpreting Ørsted's writings is frequently neither easy nor straightforward, especially in regard to the conceptual terms contained in his works, and most particularly in regard to the term *Kraft* and its compounds.

Some of the problems encountered by Gower, Caneva, and others in interpreting Ørsted's works are the result of reading them within an overly narrow context. For instance, to date there have been very few attempts to understand the conceptual foundations of Ørsted's science within a context that extends beyond his reliance on the philosophical thought of Kant and Schelling.⁸ Ørsted's intellectual interests and concerns, however, were much broader than Kantian and post-Kantian metaphysics. In particular, in addition to a life-long involvement with theological questions, he had a deep and lasting interest in aesthetics and poetry which, over the years, occupied him as much as his work in natural science. In fact, Ørsted believed that there was an essential link between aesthetics and science. Not surprisingly, then, when one takes Ørsted's aesthetic and literary ideas into account while reading his scientific writings, one finds that many interpretive problems are clarified. Indeed, as this essay will attempt to show, by reading Ørsted "aesthetically" scholars will be able to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the conceptual and theoretical foundations of his scientific thought, particularly in regard to the nature of his "conceptual confusion."

The purpose of this essay, therefore, is twofold. First, it will briefly outline Ørsted's early aesthetic thought by placing it in the context of his affiliations with early German romanticism, and by examining the poetics and philosophy of language contained in a prize-winning essay on aesthetics that he wrote in 1796. Second, the essay will present an example of how aesthetic and linguistic strategies in his writing helped shape the meaning of the theoretical terms utilized in his early scientific work. Toward this

⁸ See, for example, Dan Charly Christiansen, "Ørsted's Concept of Force and Theory of Music"; Lorraine Daston, "Ørsted and the Rational Unconscious"; and Andrew D. Wilson, "'The Way from Nature to God': The Theological Foundations of H. C. Ørsted's Philosophy of Nature," in *Hans Christian Ørsted and the Romantic Legacy in Science*, eds. R. M. Brain, Robert S. Cohen, and O. Knudsen (Dordrecht: Springer Verlag, 2007), 115–33; 235–46; and 1–11, respectively.

end, the focus of the essay will be limited to a central passage from the first installment of his “Kemiske Breve” (“Chemical Letters”), which he published in 1798 at the age of twenty-one. In the first chemical letter, one encounters a richly subtle text that, through various aesthetic and rhetorical maneuvers, addresses the status and function of conceptual terms in scientific discourse. Therefore it serves as an important source for understanding Ørsted’s conceptual and theoretical orientation at the outset of his career. It further serves to reveal that the understanding of conceptual terms expressed in Ørsted’s texts is more complex than scholars have hitherto recognized.

I.

During the course of his long career, Ørsted continually engaged in literary endeavors. He was a published poet; he was the chief editor of a monthly literary magazine for nine years; and, for more than four decades, he was the author of several philosophical and literary dialogues, many of which addressed topics associated with what he described as the natural science of the beautiful. He was an early supporter and long-time friend of Hans Christian Andersen; and was the close friend, supporter, and friendly critic of Adam Oehlenschläger, the leading romantic poet and playwright during Denmark’s Golden Age. In fact, unlike Oehlenschläger, who came to a romantic perspective gradually, Ørsted had embraced elements of early romantic aesthetic theory during his student days. In a 1807 letter to Oehlenschläger, in which he defended Novalis as a poet and natural philosopher against Oehlenschläger’s criticism—criticism that threatened their friendship—Ørsted reminded his friend that when they first met in 1797, he had already become “a friend of the new philosophy and poesie” while Oehlenschläger still called the Schlegel brothers “impudent youths.”⁹

Ørsted’s interest in Friedrich Schlegel’s aesthetic ideas had come through reading the *Atheneum*, which was edited by the Schlegel brothers and served as the central journal of early romanticism from 1798 to 1800. Prior to those years, Ørsted most probably encountered Schlegel’s work in the *Lyceum der schönen Kunst*, if not elsewhere.¹⁰ His respect for Schlegel

⁹ Letter from H. C. Ørsted to Adam Oehlenschläger, dated 1 November 1807, in *Breve fra og til Hans Christian Ørsted*, ed. Mathilde Ørsted (Copenhagen: Ch. Linds Forlag, 1870), 1: 226. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰ For Ørsted’s familiarity with the *Atheneum* see Ørsted, *Breve*, 1: 56, and Anders Sandøe Ørsted, *Af Mit Livs og Min Tids Historie*, forkortede Udgave (Copenhagen: Arne Frost-Hansens Verlag, 1951), 40 and 138–39.

increased during an extended European tour from 1801 through 1803, when the two first met each other and had time to become acquainted. While staying in Berlin during the fall and winter of 1801–02, Ørsted attended Schlegel's lectures on aesthetics and mythology, and spent time with him outside of the lecture hall, dining, conversing, and socializing.¹¹ In January of 1802, Ørsted wrote in his travel journal that he expected "to profit much from [Schlegel's] friendship."¹²

While in Paris in December of the same year, Ørsted again met Schlegel, who had relocated to the French capital. During his stay, Ørsted joined a group of Germans who gathered every Sunday evening at Schlegel's residence. According to Ørsted, "the talk [was] always about philosophical, physical or aesthetic subjects," and was of great interest to him.¹³ Like Ørsted, Schlegel was keenly interested in these subjects, and, for the past several years had been particularly interested in the general relationship between art and science, poetic expression and prose discourse, and between the cognitive faculties of imagination and reason.

Interest in the interaction between Imagination and Reason had been especially strong during the 1790s amongst German philosophers and artists. It had been addressed by Kant in his *Critique of Judgement*, by Fichte in his transcendental philosophy, and, perhaps most significantly, by Friedrich Schiller in his 1795 essay, "Von den nothwendigen Grenzen des Schönen besonders im Vortrag philosophischer Wahrheiten" ("On the Necessary Limits of the Beautiful, especially in the Presentation of Philosophical Truths"). In this essay, Schiller pointed out how aesthetic taste serves "to bring the sensible and spiritual powers of men into harmony and to unite them in an internal alliance."¹⁴ For Schiller, this integral harmony is best achieved through a mode of communication not restricted to *Gelehrten*, but one which addresses a much wider audience. Elizabeth Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby have described this mode as *haute vulgarisation*.¹⁵ Consequently, a writer dedicated to popularization who "again binds what

¹¹ Ørsted spent considerable time with Schlegel from the latter part of September through October, and then again in December of 1801, and in January and May of 1802. His interaction with Schlegel is recorded in his *Rejsedagbog* contained in folder 15 in the Ørsted Papirer housed in the Kongelige Bibliothek in Copenhagen. Accounts of Ørsted's acquaintance with Schlegel can also be found in Ørsted, *Breve*, vol. 1.

¹² Ørsted, *Breve*, 1: 37.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1: 104. For Ørsted's opinion of the Schlegel's also see pages 36 and 40.

¹⁴ Friedrich Schiller, "Von den nothwendigen Grenzen des Schönen besonders im Vortrag philosophischer Wahrheiten," *Die Horen*, dritter Band, neuentes Stück, 99.

¹⁵ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), ci–cxxxii.

has been separated and through the united summons of the sensible and spiritual powers always lays claims to the whole person has truly written no worse than one who has come closer to the highest [abstraction].”¹⁶ This kind of aesthetically informed popular writing, in fact, was a central element in Schiller’s program for the aesthetic education of humanity. Indeed, in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, which Schiller also published in 1795, he defined the aesthetic as a “middle disposition” between sensation and thought in which “sense and reason are both active at the same time.”¹⁷ As far as Schiller was concerned, “[T]here is no other way of making sensuous man rational except by first making him aesthetic.”¹⁸ A synthetic, readily accessible form of discourse was thus a stylistic imperative in the further rational and moral advancement of humanity.

Cultivating the aesthetic as understood by Schiller was in many ways also central to Schlegel’s philosophical and literary pursuits, and formed the heart of what he and Novalis termed “the romantic.” The notorious 116th fragment in the *Atheneum* begins, “Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry. Its goal is not merely to again unite all separated genres of poetry, and put poetry in contact with philosophy and rhetoric. It will and also should soon blend [*verschmelzen*] poetry and prose, brilliance and criticism, poetry of art and poetry of nature. . . .”¹⁹ Indeed, part of the guiding spirit of romanticism for Schlegel was the elimination of separate literary and intellectual genres by demonstrating how they are all ultimately arbitrary and artificial distinctions. He gave the most general expression to this view in terms of the unification of art and science, and of poetry and philosophy. As he wrote in the *Kritische Fragmente* of 1797, “The entire history of modern poesis is a continuous commentary on the short text of philosophy: All art should become science, and all science should become art; poesis and philosophy should be united.”²⁰ By 1800 he could write in his *Gespräch über die Poesie* that “Philosophy and poetry, the highest powers of humanity, which even in Athens only acted individually in the greatest blossoming of each, now grasp each other in order to live and develop mutually in eternal interaction.”²¹

During the final years of the 1790s, Novalis had also dreamed of the

¹⁶ Schiller, “Grenzen,” 115.

¹⁷ Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 141.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁹ Friedrich Schlegel, “Atheneums-Fragmente,” in *Kritische Schriften*, ed. Wolfdietrich Rasch, zweite Auflage (Munich: Hanser, 1964), 38–39.

²⁰ Schlegel, “Kritische Fragmente,” in *Kritische Schriften*, 22.

²¹ Friedrich Schlegel, “Gespräch über die Poesie,” in *Kritische Schriften*, 490.

confluence of poetry and prose. In his "Logological Fragments" from the end of 1797 he wrote:

So-called prose has come about through a restriction of absolute extremes. It exists only ad interim and plays a subordinate, temporal role. A time will come when it will no longer exist. Then a breakthrough will have come out of the restriction. A true life will have come into being, and prose and poetry will thus be intimately united and put into mutual exchange.²²

For Novalis, the synthesis of poetry and prose would produce what he termed transcendental poetry, which would then serve as the basis of linguistic expression. Ultimately, according to Novalis, "[t]he working out of a transcendental poetry should result in a system of tropes, a tropology, which would encompass the rules of the symbolic construction of the transcendental world."²³ At the level of transcendental poetry, language would become a reflection of the tropological nature of man and nature, both of which Novalis viewed as tropes of the spirit.²⁴ The pursuit of transcendental poetry, however, had more than linguistic consequences. According to Novalis, "[i]t would be the completely healthy individual whose spheres of health and mental powers were combined with each other. In the same way, a people would be most developed whose prose, speech, and conversation were included with the whole sphere of poetry and song, where there would be no difference between poetry and prose."²⁵

In his letter to Oehlenschläger from 1807, Ørsted suggested that the former's disregard for Novalis's work was due to considering him to be a representative of the "weak attempt to unite physics with poetry," a perspective that Ørsted hoped Oehlenschläger would soon regret as having absent-mindedly espoused.²⁶ Ørsted, on the other hand, found much to ad-

²² Novalis, "Logological Fragments," in *German Romantic Criticism*, ed. A. Leslie Willson (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1982), 70.

²³ Novalis, "Logological Fragments," 70.

²⁴ In the "Logological Fragments" from 1798 Novalis wrote: "Was ist der Mensch? Ein vollkommener Trope des Geistes. Alle Mittheilung ist also bildsam. . . ." In the "Treplitzer Fragmente" from the same year he wrote: "Die Welt ist ein Universaltropus des Geistes, ein symbolisches Bild desselben." See Novalis, *Schriften*, ed. Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich Schlegel, dritte Auflage (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1815), zweiter Teil, 181; and Novalis, *Aphorismen*, ed. Michael Brucker (Frankfort am Main: Insel Verlag, 1992), 79.

²⁵ Novalis, *Schriften*, zweiter Teil, 167.

²⁶ Ørsted, *Breve*, 1: 234.

mire in Novalis, whom he saw as combining “a great and free overview” of nature with “a well ordered knowledge of the most important parts of all the sciences.”²⁷ Five years after his letter to Oehlenschläger, in response to Nicolai Grundtvig’s condemnation of Novalis in his *Verdens Krønike*, Ørsted asked, “who called on you to condemn the noble, richly endowed, lovingly affecting youth, whom God called forth from his unfinished day’s work?”²⁸ In the same response he recounted how reading Novalis’s works had given him “so many richly enjoyable hours.”²⁹ Ultimately, in Ørsted’s opinion, no one was capable of completing Novalis’s work in the way the mystical youth would have wanted.³⁰

Like Schiller, Schlegel and Novalis, Ørsted was also deeply interested in the relationship between different forms of discourse, between poetry and prose, and, more generally, between art and science. Like them, he believed that these pairs of apparent opposites should be united. In several essays and dialogues he asserted that the pursuit of scientific understanding, and beyond that, the pursuit of truth generally, required the mental faculties of imagination and reason to work in conjunction with each other. In a talk entitled, “Over Forholdet mellem Taenkningens og Inbildningskraftens Naturopfatning” (“On the Relation between the Conception of Nature by Thought and Imagination”), delivered at the Scandinavske Naturforsker-møde in 1844, Ørsted remarked on “the need to seek a reconciliation between the world of reason and imagination,” since, as far as he was concerned, “only thought and imagination, enriched [*befrugtede*] by scientific thinking, can see through the light of the stars to glimpse eternity.”³¹ In an essay written for his book *Aanden i Naturen* (*Spirit in Nature*), first published in 1850, he observed that, “truth and reality are in themselves neither poetic nor prosaic; the soul’s highest progress belongs exclusively neither to poetry nor prose, but it is [their] common property.”³² Earlier, in 1808, in an unpublished dialogue on mysticism, he wrote that reason and imagination are “so integrally combined in all expressions of the soul, that one cannot easily differentiate what each specifically contributes.”³³ Finally,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1: 233.

²⁸ H. C. Ørsted, *Imod den store Anklager* (Copenhagen: Andreas Seidelin, 1814), 17.

²⁹ Ørsted, *Imod*, 43.

³⁰ Ørsted, *Breve*, 1: 234.

³¹ H. C. Ørsted, “Over Forholdet mellem Taenkningens og Inbildningskraftens Naturopfatning,” in H. C. Ørsted, *Aanden i Naturen* (Copenhagen: Andr. Fred. Høst, 1856), 1: 44 and 51.

³² H. C. Ørsted, “Overtro og Vantro i deres Forhold til Naturvidenskaben,” in *Aanden i Naturen*, 1: 74.

³³ H. C. Ørsted, “Samtalen over Mysticismen,” in *Samlede og Efterladte Skrifter af H. C. Ørsted* (Copenhagen: Andr. Fred. Høst, 1851–52), 5: 58.

to cite just one more example, in an unpublished manuscript from the 1830s, entitled, *Over Videnskabens og Kunstens Vaesen* (*On the Nature of Science and Art*), Ørsted wrote that: “[s]cience and art at their highest point meet each other When the nature of things is presented in the most perfect mode, i.e., for the entire soul, then art and science are merged together [*sammensmeltede*].”³⁴ Echoes of Schiller’s mode of aesthetic communication resound throughout these examples.

All these statements by Ørsted, which span more than forty years, reflect an aesthetic perspective he began to articulate shortly after the appearance of Schiller’s works of 1795. The most complete presentation of his aesthetic views appeared in an essay written during his second year at Copenhagen University, in 1796, in response to two questions posed by the university; viz., (1) “How can prose style be corrupted by coming too close to poetic style?” and (2) “What are the boundaries between poetic and prose expression?”³⁵ He began the essay with a Gottschedian critique of stylistic bombast and a call to return to natural forms of writing and speaking. As he wrote, “one now scorns simple nature as something far too base, and one must walk on stilts in order to appear elevated.”³⁶ Compelling “*pragtfulde Svulst*” to give way to “den simple Nature,” however, would be no mean feat in Ørsted’s eyes.³⁷

³⁴ H. C. Ørsted, “Over Videnskabens og Kunstens Vaesen,” in *Samlede og Efterladte Skrifter*, 9: 42.

³⁵ H. C. Ørsted, *Forsøg til en Besvaerelse af det, for Aaret 1796, ved det kiøbenhavnske Universitet, udsatte Priiisporqsmal I Aesthetiken: Hvorledes kan det prosaiske Sprog fordaerves ved at komme det poetiske for naer? og Hvor ere Graendserne mellem det poetiske og det prosaiske Udtryk?* (Copenhagen: Johan Frederik Schultz, 1797).

³⁶ Ørsted, *Forsøg*, 2. In his *Redekunst* from 1728, Gottshed had written, “Alles auf Stelzen gehen; Alles hoch, verblümt, sinnreich und prächtig; oder vielmehr übersteigend, dunkel, schwülstig und hochtrabend klingen.” Ørsted’s passage reads, “Poesien maae nu, for dog at beholde et eget Sprog, ogsaa overstride Naturen, og snart er hele Sproget vanskabt. Man foragter nu den simple Natur, som noget alt for lavt, og man maae, for at synes høi, gaae paa Stylder. At bringe Naturen tilbage . . . synes naesten at overstige menneskelige Kraeften. . . .” In the next sentence, he refers to “den pragtfulde Svulst.” The passage from Gottsched is quoted in Eric Blackall, *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 157. Blackall’s work contains a wealth of insightful material relevant to the aesthetic background to Ørsted’s essay. Of importance for understanding the German influence on Danish style in the eighteenth century is F. Rønning, *Rationalismens Tidsalder* (Copenhagen: Karl Schønbergs Forlag, 1886). Ørsted’s use of “simple Natur” also appears to be an intertextual allusion to Schiller’s “einfältigen Natur” and “einfach Natur” and other variations found in his “Ueber das Naïve,” and “Die sentimentalischen Dichter,” which he published in *Die Horen* in 1795. The two examples cited here are from “Ueber das Naïve,” *Die Horen*, Vierter Band, Eilftes Stück, 43 and 55.

³⁷ Ørsted, *Forsøg*, 2–3.

Ørsted went on in the essay to address the presumed differences between poetry and prose, with particular emphasis on traditional descriptions of the nature of poetry. One of the central elements in his argument was the contention that poetry ultimately differs from prose only as a matter of linguistic usage rather than by any intrinsic quality of language itself. Therefore, Ørsted argued that, strictly speaking, there is no clearly definable difference between those two forms of speech; they both are merely part of a continuum of linguistic intentionality. Consequently, drawing a clear and distinct boundary between poetry and prose is ultimately impossible. Thus, in terms of their respective intentions, Ørsted argued that the purpose of prose is to instruct, while the fundamental purpose of poetry is to awaken certain feelings, and to contribute to the cultivation and ennoblement of taste and the human heart. To this end, he asserted that the purpose of poetic speech is to arouse “indistinct ideas” (*utydelige Forestillinger*).³⁸

Given the end to which it is directed, the stuff of poetry, as Ørsted wrote, “never concerns the rules of logic, or the rigorously proven truths of mathematics, or the subtleties of metaphysics.”³⁹ It therefore accomplishes its goal of affecting the passions by being tied to sensation, be it external or internal sensation, in some way. Indeed, Ørsted maintained that poetry should be understood as completely sensible speech, whose purpose is the sensible presentation of its objects.⁴⁰ Thus, when poetic speech draws on abstract words or concepts, it must make certain they can always be connected to a sensible sign. Such connections can be made, according to Ørsted, in three general ways: either by “designating an insensible entity with another, outwardly sensible entity”; or by comparing the insensible entity with one that is outwardly sensible; or by providing sensible examples to illustrate the insensible entity.⁴¹ All of these modes of connection involve the use of poetic figuration, particularly different kinds of metaphor. As Ørsted wrote, “I believe one can locate the nature of all the technical figures created by rhetoricians in sensation [*Sandselighed*].”⁴²

The notion that poetry is rooted in purely sensible speech and involves the production of indistinct ideas was not new to Ørsted. As he acknowledged in the essay, he had taken this description from Alexander Baumgarten’s poetics. These were first presented in 1735 in the *Meditationes*

³⁸ Ibid., 9.

³⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁴¹ Ibid., 13.

⁴² Ibid., 13.

philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus, quas amplissimi philosophorum ordinis, a work that has been described as having “helped to inaugurate a characteristically modern approach to poetry, and indeed, to all art.”⁴³ The appeal of Baumgarten’s poetics to Ørsted can be found in the fact that Baumgarten, like Ørsted and the newer generation of poets and aesthetic theorists, was, in the words of Ernst Cassirer, “one of the first thinkers to overcome the antagonism between ‘sensualism’ and ‘rationalism’ and to achieve a new productive synthesis of ‘reason’ and ‘sensitivity.’”⁴⁴

At the heart of Baumgarten’s poetics lay the notion of what he termed “extensive clarity,” but which may just as well be called representational confusion, or even conceptual confusion.⁴⁵ It is this characteristic, according to Baumgarten, that distinguished poetry from philosophical discourse:

Distinct representations, complete, adequate profound through every degree, are not sensate, and therefore, not poetic. . . . This is the principal reason why philosophy and poetry are scarcely ever thought able to perform the same office, since philosophy pursues conceptual distinctness above everything else, while poetry does not strive to attain this, as falling outside its province. [. . .] Since poetic representations are clear representations . . . and since they are not distinct . . . they are confused.⁴⁶

Moreover, according to Baumgarten, the more “confused” a concept or representation is, the more poetic it is. Thus,

Concept A, which, independent of the characteristic traits of concept B, is represented along with concept B, is said to adhere to it. That concept to which another adheres is called a complex con-

⁴³ Karsten Harries, “Metaphor and Transcendence,” in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 93.

⁴⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 356.

⁴⁵ Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus, quas amplissimi philosophorum ordinis* (Halle, 1735). An English edition is available under the title, *Reflections on Poetry: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, trans. with the original text, introduction, and notes Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954). The quotations from Baumgarten are taken from the English edition.

⁴⁶ Baumgarten, *Reflections*, 42.

cept, as opposed to a simple concept to which no other adheres. Since a complex concept represents more than a simple one, complex concepts are extensively clearer . . . and hence more poetic than simple concepts.⁴⁷

When in representation A more is represented than in B, C, D, and so on, but all are confused, A will be said to be extensively clearer than the rest. [. . .] In fact, the more that is gathered in a confused representation, the more extensive clarity the representation has . . . and the more poetic it is.⁴⁸

As Karl Aschenbrenner and William Holther have explained in their edition of Baumgarten's work, "[w]e should say today that the ideal poetic representation is a highly condensed symbol, rich with ambiguity and as complex as the poet can contrive."⁴⁹ As will be seen below, Ørsted not only adopted Baumgarten's notion of conceptual confusion for the purpose of his essay on aesthetics, he also employed it in his *Kemiske Breve*. There, however, he demonstrated how natural science, metaphysics and poetry can be confused in a linguistic representation, creating a symbolic mode of expression similar to that advocated by Schlegel and, especially, Novalis. Before turning to Ørsted's first chemical letter, however, one other section of his essay on aesthetics needs to be considered.

After a fairly lengthy discussion of how prose is corrupted by becoming too poetic, viz., by incorporating too many poetic elements and adopting too much of a poetic tone, Ørsted pointed out that "poetic language is not completely displeasing in prose."⁵⁰ He developed this notion in a passage worth quoting at length.

The most distinguished reason which allows the prose writer to avail himself of poetic language is when the prose writer has the same intention as the poet; and he can, at times, without transgressing his boundaries, have the same one. How often doesn't the speaker talk, and with good reason, to the senses before talking to the understanding because he knows how difficult it is to win over his listeners when they do not agree with him, or when they are, no less, against him! Although the prose speaker here, in the same

⁴⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁰ Ørsted, *Forsøg*, 28.

manner as the poet, speaks poetic language [*taler det poetiske Sprog*] because he wants to speak to the senses, there remains a not insignificant difference between them, in the respect that the poet doesn't have any other reason why he speaks to the senses than to shape or sharpen them. Therefore, his whole intention is directed at the senses. The prose speaker, on the other hand, only speaks to the senses after careful consideration, and in order to win over the understanding.⁵¹

Where he had earlier differentiated poetry and prose in terms of their intentions, Ørsted here, at the conclusion of his essay, turned his attention to the middle range of language where poetry and prose are mixed together, and where their intentions also blend into each other. As the passage above indicates, a prose speaker or writer can legitimately utilize poetic language for rhetorical purposes to persuade an otherwise skeptical or hostile audience. When faced with that situation, the prose writer cannot rely on discursive arguments to convince his audience to believe him; he needs to appeal, not to their reason, but to their imagination and sensations. That is to say, he must communicate his point indirectly to his audience in the effort to "win over the understanding." One cannot help but be reminded here again of Schiller's program of *haute vulgarisation*, and his declaration that "[T]here is no other way of making sensuous man rational except by first making him aesthetic."

According to Ørsted's aesthetics, then, in the middle range of language, where poetry and prose are brought together and mixed, a writer is able to remove the specific limitations of both forms of expression without destroying their specific qualities. At the same time, he is able to confer upon both a more general character capable of appealing to the whole person, i.e., to the reader's imagination, passions, senses, and reason. The most effective means for persuading an audience that might be resistant to the content of the presentation would be to adopt a form between discursive argumentation and poetic/rhetorical persuasion, a form that would appeal fundamentally to both the sensuous and rational sides of the reader, and that would embody the aesthetic as understood by Baumgarten, Schiller, Schlegel, and Novalis. Such a form would correspond to Schiller's style of popularization, which he employed most effectively in his aesthetic letters. As will now be seen, Ørsted utilized this Schillerian form in his chemical letters, where he first presented Kant's dynamical theory of matter—a presentation he made

⁵¹ Ibid., 31.

in the face of atomistic orthodoxy in the scientific community, i.e., to a skeptical, if not hostile, audience.

II.

Ørsted began his career as a physical scientist with a series of four chemical letters published in the *Bibliothek for Physik, Medicin og Oeconomie* in 1798 and 1799. In them, he promised to present the “systematics,” or systematic part of chemistry. Toward this end, Ørsted began the first letter by describing chemistry as the branch of natural science that teaches us about the constituent parts of bodies. He then addressed his anonymous correspondent as follows:

It must therefore readily occur to you to ask: What is the cause enabling several different bodies to be united in a single cohering whole? Before I answer the question, I myself shall raise another one: What is the cause enabling several small parts of one and the same kind to be united in a cohering whole? I shall first answer my own question because it will then be easier to answer yours. My question has already been answered by a famous thinker, that is, the famous Kant. This man's penetrating investigations have taught us that every body has two fundamental forces, the force of cohesion and the force of expansion [*at ethvert Legeme har to Grundkraefter, Sammenaengskraften og Udvidekraften*]. The latter force makes a body fill space, the former hinders it, so that a single body will not fill all space. . . . I cannot, without straying far from my goal, make you familiar with the deep investigations upon which the proofs that bodies really have these fundamental forces rest; but I will present some experiences which, in certain ways, can serve to persuade you at least of the existence of the force of cohesion [*Sammenaengskraften*].⁵²

Even though Ørsted began his presentation in terms of Kant's metaphysics of matter, he did not proceed to offer a metaphysical discussion of Kant's dynamical theory, nor did he offer any arguments or proofs to ground the theory. More specifically, he did not discuss how the fundamen-

⁵² H. K. Ørsted, “Kemiske Breve. Første Brev,” *Bibliothek for Physik, Medicin og Oeconomie*, Sjette Hefte (Copenhagen: H. Tikjøbs Forlag, 1798), 154–55.

tal forces make the existence of matter possible, or how they act internally in discrete bodies. Instead, he offered examples of how macroscopic bodies cohere with each other, such as placing one polished glass plate on another, setting a drop of mercury along side of another and watching them unite into a single drop, and dipping a finger into water and noticing how the moisture hangs on to it after removing it. From these examples, he concluded that, “all these [experiences] demonstrate that the one body manifests a *Sammenhaengskraft* with the other [*alt dette beviser, at det ene Legeme yttreer en Sammenhaengskraft med det andet*].”⁵³

Consequently, by developing as it does, the text of Ørsted’s letter shifts the focus of the reader away from an initial Kantian and metaphysical understanding of *Grundkraefter* as the internal causal principles of matter, to an empirical understanding of *Sammenhaengskraft* as an external capability of certain bodies to cohere or adhere with others, but not necessarily to unite internally with them as the first and third examples show. In other words, the text shifts from presenting an account of metaphysical causation to one of phenomenal description. With this contextual shift, a single “proper” reading of the key term *Sammenhaengskraft* becomes impossible: the text leaves it unclear both as to whether or not *Sammenhaengskraft* functions as a theoretical concept or an empirical descriptive term, and whether or not it signifies a theoretical entity or a general capacity to act in some way. In light of Ørsted’s aesthetics and philosophy of language, however, one can conclude that *Sammenhaengskraft* was to serve in all these capacities.

By reading *Sammenhaengskraft* in all these ways, one is able to gain some kind of causal and metaphysical insight into the capacity of bodies to cohere with each other, but the insight conveys nothing certain about the specific nature or real existence of the assumed or inferred underlying entity or cause behind the observed phenomena. In other words, combining the possible readings only results in causal and ontological understanding that is analogical and hypothetical. The macroscopic, empirical examples offered by Ørsted only hint at the possible, if not probable, existence of an unobservable entity that acts causally. Moreover, it should be noted that Ørsted’s use of the examples in his text employed two of the three modes he listed in his essay on aesthetics by which one renders abstract terms or concepts sensible in poetic speech; i.e., he effectively compared an insensible entity (a fundamental force of matter) with outwardly sensible phenomena,

⁵³ Ørsted, “Kemiske Breve,” 155–56.

and provided sensible examples to illustrate the existence of an insensible entity. Both of these involve analogy and point toward the tropological nature of scientific and theoretical understanding.

In addition to connecting phenomenalist description and metaphysical explanation in the term *Sammenhaengskraft*, Ørsted's use of this term carried further important implications and consequences. From the start, he led his readers to believe that *Sammenhaengskraft* corresponded to Kant's term for one of the fundamental metaphysical forces of matter. It turns out, however, that the German cognate of *Sammenhaengskraft*, i.e., *Zusammenhangskraft*, was not the term used by Kant in his metaphysics of corporeal nature. His word was *Anziehungskraft*. The Danish equivalent for Kant's term is *Tiltraekningskraft*, which Ørsted used throughout an analysis of Kant's theory of the fundamental forces of matter in his *Grundtraekkene af Naturmetaphysiken*, published in 1799. In fact, even though Kant did discuss *Zusammenhang* (cohesion) in his *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften*, the term *Zusammenhangskraft* was not part of his philosophical lexicon. In his discussion of the concept of cohesion, Kant had emphasized its a posteriori and purely physical character. He therefore only considered *Zusammenhang* to be what he called a derivative *Flächenkraft*, not a *Grundkraft* of matter. According to Kant, when *Zusammenhang* "is explained as the reciprocal attraction of matter, which is solely restricted to the condition of contact, it does not belong to the possibility of matter in general, and therefore can not be known a priori to be connected with it." In the end, as far as he was concerned, "[t]his quality would thus not be metaphysical, but physical, and therefore not belong to our present considerations."⁵⁴

Ørsted was well aware of Kant's understanding of *Zusammenhang*, and, in an essay review from 1799, he agreed with Kant's assessment of its derivative and purely physical qualities, concluding that "[t]he *Sammenhaengskraft* is thus composed of both *Grundkraefterne*."⁵⁵ A few years later, Ørsted again differentiated between *Sammenhaengskraft* and the *Grundkraefter* of matter on the same grounds used by Kant, writing, "with its dependence on contact, *Sammenhaengskraft* is shown to be very different from *Tiltraekningskraft*."⁵⁶ He left the question of whether or not they really are different unanswered.

⁵⁴ Kant, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften* (1786), in *Immanuel Kants Werke*, ed. Ernst Cassirer (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer Verlag, 1922), 4: 435–36; 425.

⁵⁵ H. C. Ørsted, review of A. W. Hauch's *Begyndelsesgrunde til Naturlaeren* (1799) in Ørsted, *Naturvidenskabelige Skrifter*, 3: 44.

⁵⁶ H. C. Ørsted, *Videnskaben om Naturens almindelige Love*, Første Bind (Copenhagen: Fr. Brummer, 1809), 47.

Thus, by taking the a posteriori empirical concept of cohesion and transferring it to Kant's a priori metaphysical concept of a fundamental force of matter, and by substituting the term *Sammenhaengskraft* for *Tiltraekningskraft*, Ørsted's text once again demonstrated the tropological status of the concept and its signifier, and how our knowledge of the metaphysical *Grundkraft* of attraction is also at best analogical and metaphorical. In other words, Ørsted's text also employed the third of the methods by which a writer renders a prose expression into poetic speech, i.e., by designating an insensible entity with a different sensible one.

Significantly, the term *Sammenhaengskraft* was a recent addition to Danish scientific language. According to Peter Skautrup, the term was introduced by Adam Hauch in his textbook on general physics. Skautrup cites the second edition of this work, which appeared in 1799, but Hauch had already introduced it in the first edition published in 1794.⁵⁷ At the time he introduced it, Hauch used *Sammenhaengskraft* synonymously with cohesion. As Hauch wrote, we "do not know the cause of the *Sammenhaeng* or cohesion between the parts of bodies . . . so one generally calls the force that is unknown to us *Sammenhaengskraft* or *Cohesionskraft*" as a way of describing it. He further pointed out that Newton "assumed [the existence of] an actual attracting force [*tiltraekkende Kraft*], about which we know nothing other than its effects."⁵⁸ Hauch, however, concluded that "one is correct to assume that the cause of cohesion is completely different [*gandske forskiellig*] from the general force of attraction [*tiltraekkende Kraft*]" assumed by Newton, since the *tiltraekkende Kraft* is capable of acting at a distance, while the *Sammenhaengskraft* "cannot act without immediate contact" between bodies.⁵⁹ Hauch agreed with Kant on this fundamental point. To illustrate this, he then presented two of the three examples later used by Ørsted; viz., the examples involving two polished glass plates and two drops of mercury.⁶⁰

But Hauch was not the only one in Denmark who discussed cohesion in 1794. In the second edition of his *Chemisk Haandbog*, which appeared that same year, Nicolai Tychsen also turned his attention to the action of *sammenhaenge*. His understanding, however, was considerably different from Hauch's. For Tychsen, *Sammenhaeng* was a manifestation of the general force of attraction, which, he believed, expressed itself in different

⁵⁷ Peter Skautrup, *Det Danske Sprogs Historie* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1968), 3: 418. Also see Adam W. Hauch, *Begyndelsesgrunde til Naturlaeren*, 1–2 Deels (Copenhagen: 1794), 32–33.

⁵⁸ Hauch, *Begyndelsesgrunde*, 32.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

modes. Thus, he wrote, “[t]he actions of the *tiltraekkende Kraft* are manifested in many kinds of instances, in different modes, and with many results. At one time it is manifested with a mere *Sammenhaeng*, and is then called *Sammenhaengs-Forvandskab* [*affinita adhaesiones*]. At another time it is manifested by aggregation [*Sammenhobning*], and is then called *Sammenhobnings-* or *Sammenføielses-Forvandskab* [*affinitas aggregates*].”⁶¹ To illustrate the action of cohesion as a form of general attraction, Tychsen also presented the examples of two polished glass plates and two drops of mercury.⁶²

Consequently, even though *Sammenhaengskraft* had had but a brief linguistic history by 1798, and seemed to be fixed in terms of its general reference (extension), its meaning (intension) was far from set or uniform. It was indeed possible for two different natural scientists to attribute two diametrically opposed meanings to the same term. One could therefore conclude that *Sammenhaengskraft* was extensively clear, but conceptually indistinct, or “confused” in the sense of Baumgarten’s poetics. Ørsted demonstrated these qualities of the term by collapsing both known meanings, supported by the same referents, in his text. The intertextual allusions in Ørsted’s letter further served to demonstrate that while we certainly observe phenomena we describe linguistically in terms of attraction and cohesion, we do not know the physical cause or causes of those phenomena except analogically. We also only have a sense, or hint, of the metaphysical reality behind the phenomena by means of analogy.

This kind of conceptual and linguistic synthesis, carried out in a Kantian, post-Kantian, and Danish context, was fully in keeping with Ørsted’s desire to unify art and science, and was considered by him to be the goal of scientific method and understanding. At the outset of his essay on aesthetics he had argued that it was only by following this kind of “middle path” (*Middelveien*) that prose, poetry, and language in general could avoid alienating themselves from nature, transgressing their boundaries, and decaying into complete barbarism.⁶³ He reiterated the need for this kind of synthesis in a different context in his *Grundtraekkene af Naurmetaphysiken* of 1798–99. As part of his introductory remarks, he wrote:

In order to arrive at completeness in his knowledge of nature, one must begin from two extremes, from experience and from the Un-

⁶¹ Nicolai Tychsen, *Chemisk Haandbog* (Copenhagen: Gyldendals Forlag, 1794), 1: 297.

⁶² Ibid., 1: 289 and 297.

⁶³ Ørsted, *Forsøg*, 2–3.

derstanding itself. . . . It is understood that I am speaking here about the method found in the Understanding's own mode of proceeding, not the method that is found in textbooks. . . . When the empiricist in his regression towards general laws of nature meets the metaphysician in his progression, science will reach its perfection.⁶⁴

Ørsted's mode of using *Sammenhaengskraft* was his initial attempt to bring empirical and metaphysical understanding together, and to restore nature in scientific thinking. As the analysis of *Sammenhaengskraft* has also indicated, it was not through the conceptually distinct *Sammenhaeng* that this synthesis could occur, but through the conceptually indistinct *Kraft*. Given its semantic multivalency, *Kraft* served as the analogical (metaphorical) nexus between metaphysics and empiricism. The methods Ørsted employed to demonstrate this, however, lay outside the restricted domain of natural science itself, having been drawn from his work in aesthetics. Moreover, in its capacity as a compound word, *Sammenhaengskraft* served as an outwardly sensible manifestation of the confluence of the Baumgartenian understanding of prose (*Sammenhaeng*) and poetry (*Kraft*). Ørsted thereby extended the range of Baumgarten's initial understanding of conceptual confusion, showing how it also applied to the confusion of different genres of thought and expression. This kind of romantic revision of Baumgarten's aesthetics lay at the heart of Ørsted's understanding of the status, function, and nature of conceptual terms in natural scientific discourse. It reveals the deep romantic roots of his scientific thought.

CONCLUSION

Even though this essay offers but a limited example of the relationship between aesthetics and science in Ørsted's writings, one can begin to see the fundamental nature of the relationship. The example of *Sammenhaengskraft* demonstrates not only how thoroughly ensconced Ørsted was in romantic aesthetics, but how he translated his aesthetic ideas into his understanding of the conceptual foundations of natural science. At the core of his aesthetic orientation lay Baumgarten's notion of conceptual confusion, which he adapted and transformed, and the idea that theoretical sci-

⁶⁴ H. C. Ørsted, *Grundtraekkene af Naturmetaphysiken* (1799) in *Naturvidenskabelige Skrifter*, 1: 35–36.

tific discourse necessarily includes poetic elements. The focus of both these related notions was the concept and term *Kraft*. To draw from Herder, one might say, "Die schönen Wissenschaft, oder vielmehr die einzige schöne Wissenschaft, die Poesie, wirkt durch Kraft. . . . Kraft ist das Wesen der Poesie."⁶⁵

One can also see how Gower's and Caneva's assessment of the muddled nature and poor quality of Ørsted's thought needs to be revised, at least in part. For, contrary to Caneva's assertions, Ørsted did employ a coherent terminology centered on the concept and term of force at the outset of his career. Caneva's reading has simply been guided by a hermeneutic that does not match the textual strategies and intentions found in Ørsted's writing, or the multivalent character of *Sammenhaengskraft*, and more generally, *Kraft*. However, one can certainly accept Gower's declaration that Ørsted "involved himself in conceptual confusions, particularly with regard to force . . .," but only if it is understood in the context of Ørsted's aesthetics and philosophy of language. In that context, Ørsted clearly would have agreed that his writing and thought were filled with conceptual confusions, just he intended them to be.

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⁶⁵ J. G. Herder, "Kritische Wälder: oder Betrachtungen über die Wissenschaft und Kunst des Schönen. Erstes Wäldchen," in J. G. Herders *Sämmtliche Werke, Zur schönen Literatur und Kunst*, vierter Theil (Carlsruhe: im Bureau der deutschen Classiker, 1821), 169–70.

The Place of the Sacred in the Absence of God:
Charles Taylor's A Secular Age

Peter E. Gordon

INTRODUCTION

The philosopher Simone Weil, born in France in 1909 to Jewish but secular parents, succumbed to her initial mystical experience in Santa Maria degli Angeli, a twelfth-century Romanesque chapel in Assisi once frequented by Saint Francis. "Something stronger than I was," Weil later wrote, "compelled me for the first time in my life to go down on my knees." An ardently political thinker with Trotskyist sympathies—Lev Bronstein at one point stayed with her family—Weil was known for both an ascetic leftism and a fervidly Catholic piety. The combination inspired peers at the *École Normale Supérieure* to give her a vicious sobriquet: "the Red Virgin." An early pacifist, by 1939 Weil condemned her non-violent period as "mon erreur criminelle," and in exile, first in New York and then London, she became an outspoken essayist for the Free French. Throughout her life she was passionate in spirit but precariously frail in body. By 1943 her acts of stringent self-privation brought her to the Middlesex hospital, where she died of heart failure at the age of only 34.

The example of Simone Weil came to mind when reading Charles Taylor's monumental new book, *A Secular Age*.¹ Perhaps this was due to the fact that Weil, though by origin a secular Jew, opened her soul to a highly

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), hereafter SA.

reflective, politically progressive, and philosophically articulate strain of Catholicism not unlike the sort Taylor seeks to defend in his book. Weil herself remained critical of the Church as a political institution. She even refused communion, preferring instead an anomic spirituality modeled upon Saint Francis and the long tradition of Catholic mysticism. Taylor, too, is noticeably bitter regarding the less progressive aspects of the modern Church. In a work otherwise noteworthy for its restraint and a generous acknowledgement of the varieties of religious expression, the angriest passages concern Roman Catholicism's retreat from the promises of Vatican II. Taylor is also critical of the Church for its ambivalence concerning the facts of human sexuality. He grants that asceticism and priestly celibacy may have a place for some believers but he is worried at official Catholic policies that betray an unrealistic denial of the body and a drive toward "excarnation." On this theme he is worlds apart from Weil, whose habits of self-mortification were extreme and proved ultimately fatal. But it is a central lesson of Taylor's book that there are multiple paths to God. Again and again he admonishes us to remain open toward the varieties of religious transcendence. Taylor therefore ranks alongside Weil within a tradition of religiously and politically progressive Catholic philosophy. Admittedly, this tradition no longer has the strength it once did. In the swelling chorus of intellectuals who advocate a greater place for religion within the secular world, very few, whatever their creed, speak in tones so measured and humane.

But there is a further reason that Weil's example may prove instructive. This has to do with the especially unorthodox character of her convictions, best captured in a remark from the anthology of her writings, *Waiting for God*: "Attentiveness without an object is prayer in its supreme form." Like many theological aphorisms, the phrase embodies a paradox. After all, doesn't religious prayer necessarily have some object, some purpose? Doesn't one have to pray to some *thing*, some *One*? Perhaps so, perhaps not. As Tertullian is (falsely) remembered as saying: *Credo quia absurdum est*. The notion of prayer without an object may serve here as an introduction to my comments. At the end of this review, I will come back to this idea so as to explain why, notwithstanding my deep admiration for Taylor's book, I must confess to a certain perplexity regarding some of its premises and implications.²

² I owe an enormous debt to three Harvard colleagues, Sean Kelly, James Kloppenberg, and Michael Sandel, for our reading group during a snow-heavy January in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I also received many suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper from Warren Breckman, Ludmila Guenova, Sean Kelly, James Kloppenberg, Benjamin Lazier,

TAYLOR'S PREVIOUS WORK

The publication of Taylor's new book is in itself an event of immense importance for intellectual historians, philosophers, and social theorists, as it represents a culmination to more than forty years' philosophical labor. Beginning with his *The Explanation of Behavior* in 1964, he has developed a theory of practice rooted in the phenomenological tradition of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty that emphasizes the sense-directedness or intentionality of human action.³ Drawn most of all to German canons of hermeneutic and historicist philosophy, Taylor has grown ever bolder in his arguments against behaviorist and rational-choice models of explanation, insofar as these presuppose what he considers a formalistic and culturally impoverished model of selfhood he calls "disengaged agency."⁴

Taylor's classic 1975 text, *Hegel, An Exposition*, broke through decades of anti-Hegelian prejudice in the English-speaking world by providing an historically faithful yet rationally intelligible reconstruction of Hegel's philosophy.⁵ The animating claim of the book was that Hegel's model of Spirit, borrowing upon concepts from Herder and the *Sturm und Drang* movement, exhibited a certain dynamic of self-realization through externalization which Taylor termed "expressivism" (a phrase he took from his teacher Isaiah Berlin). The expressivist self was not fully formed and ontologically independent of its surroundings, it was rather dependent upon its actions and articulations to realize what it was. The subject, individual or collective, was of necessity embodied in certain historical and cultural contexts, and it achieved self-consciousness and self-satisfaction as a free agency only insofar as it came to recognize itself in a world after its own image.⁶ Taylor's model of subjectivity in the Hegel-book drew upon a variety of resources, especially the cardinal insight of existential phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty that the essence of selfhood is a practical and historically situated *being-in-the-world*: perceptual knowledge cannot be understood within the confines of the post-Cartesian tradi-

Samuel Moyn, Judith Surkis, and Eugene Sheppard. My comments here are of course wholly my own, and this applies most of all to any misunderstandings of Taylor's book.

³ See, for example, the remarks on Merleau-Ponty in Charles Taylor, *The Explanation of Behavior* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 69.

⁴ Charles Taylor, "Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 317–36.

⁵ Taylor, *Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

⁶ For a critical response to Berlin and Taylor's use of the category of expressivism, see Robert Norton, "The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment," *JHI* 68 (2007): 635–65.

tion of epistemology, since our experiences of both the world and ourselves are irrevocably constituted through language, social institutions, and the body (all claims, one should note, that resonate deeply with Catholic doctrine concerning both the *ecclesia* and the body of Christ).⁷

The phenomenological model of embodied and situated subjectivity provided a founding premise for Taylor's 1989 *Sources of the Self*, a masterpiece of historical and philosophical reconstruction that investigated the various conceptions of selfhood from Plato to the present-day, with sustained attention to Descartes, Locke, and other exponents of modern subjectivity.⁸ Building upon a familiar Heideggerian complaint against the predominance of Cartesian disengagement in modern epistemology and social theory, a key message of the book was that Locke and other Anglo-Saxon theorists had taken a fallacious turn insofar as they conceived the self to be "punctual," that is, atomistic, individualistic, and only contingently bound to its cultural or historical surroundings.⁹ Notwithstanding its rigorously impartial tone and the prodigious erudition displayed on every page, *Sources* was obviously driven by powerful philosophical convictions, and in the closing pages it was no less obvious that Taylor was laying the groundwork for commitments of a robustly religious character. Against the apparent dissatisfactions of the punctual self, Taylor proposed that we moderns might draw greater normative guidance from the strong spiritual framework of what he called "Judaean-Christian theism," the implication being that *without* such a framework we were likely to suffer dissociation, disorientation, and *anomie*.

The argument in favor of something like a spiritual framework and against the dissatisfactions of post-Cartesian or "punctual" selfhood has grown increasingly vivid in Taylor's more recent publications over the last ten years. The spiritual animus was clearly at work in both *A Catholic Modernity?*¹⁰ and *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*.¹¹

⁷ See Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology," in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* ed. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 464–88; on language and the German hermeneutic tradition see his "Theories of Meaning," in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers, Vol. I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 248–92.

⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁹ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*; for a very different treatment see Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*, ed. and intro. James L. Heft (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹¹ Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 41.

But it is only with *A Secular Age* that Taylor has assumed a fully unapologetic voice. Here he speaks not merely as a modern philosopher who happens to be Catholic, but a truly Catholic philosopher for modernity. For those of us who have greatly admired Taylor for his philosophical labors but who understood him to be a philosopher *simpliciter* without paying attention to his confessional commitments, the religious or apologetic purposes that quicken *A Secular Age* may come as a surprise. But it is crucial that one take note of the book's unabashedly confessional character, since the very coherence of the book and the legitimacy of its argument depend upon a quite specific conception of religion. To see why this is so will demand a careful reconstruction of its claims.

SECULARIZATION WITHOUT SUBTRACTION

A Secular Age belongs to a long tradition of ambitious efforts by philosophers of history and social theorists to assess both the process and the significance of secularization in the modern West. The important precedents include: Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Löwith, Blumenberg, and, most recently, Marcel Gauchet, whose *The Disenchantment of the World* was published in French in 1985 and in English in 1997 with a critical foreword by Taylor himself.¹² What distinguishes Taylor from most of his antecedents is that he rejects what he calls the "subtraction thesis." This is the claim that in the modern West human experience has been stripped of its mystifying veils, typified in Marx and Engels's famous description concerning the effects of capitalism: "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind."¹³ This view counts as subtractive because it implies that when the West dispensed with traditional notions of the sacred it underwent a process of metaphysical education concerning the true nature of things. Capitalism on this view brings not a mere transformation but a genuine *metanoia*—a turning from illusion to reality—that leaves us to confront only the terminal obfuscations of bourgeois ideology, which are themselves fated to disappear.

More important than Marxism for Taylor is that other, more pessimis-

¹² Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge, foreword Charles Taylor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Second Edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 476.

tic narrative of subtraction, memorably described by Max Weber in his 1919 speech, “*Wissenschaft als Beruf*,” as *the disenchantment of the world*. One typically thinks of Weber as a theorist of instrumental reason. But Weber notes that the West’s long process of “intellectualization and rationalization” has *not* necessarily brought an “increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives.” After all, he writes, the “American Indian” or the “Hottentot” knows more about his tools than most of us know about the streetcars we ride every day. Rationalization instead means “the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one could learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted.”¹⁴

The process can aptly be termed *subtraction*—Weber’s German word, *Entzauberung*, is negative—insofar as the rise of instrumental rationality necessarily means a loss of commonly shared value-orientations: “Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations.” Weber saw this process of disenchantment as nearly irresistible, and to those who still felt the need for religion, he offered grim counsel:

To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times, one must say: may he rather return silently, without the usual publicity build-up of renegades, but simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him. After all, they do not make it hard for him. One way or another he has to bring his “intellectual sacrifice”—that is inevitable.¹⁵

The message was condescending: the modern condition of value-relativity was no doubt difficult to bear. Although Weber reserved a certain admiration for those who could still sustain unconditional value-commitments, he clearly saw the religious man’s *sacrificio dell’ intelletto* as a retreat from the hard truths of the age. Facing up to the loss of the gods was only for the strong.

Taylor’s chief complaint against the subtraction thesis seems to be that

¹⁴ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 139.

¹⁵ Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” 155.

it is circular.¹⁶ Marxians and Weberians alike think that religion is no longer compatible with what we moderns now recognize as the truth of the human condition, and so it follows that religion must be either a mystification or a failure of nerve. But this is to predecide the question as to whether religion itself is valid. The subtractionists tell us that as moderns they know the *real* components of human experience, and the story they tell about the falling away of erstwhile belief is designed to hand them their own credentials: it tells them historically how they progressed from past ignorance and how they arrived at their privileged position of metaphysical insight. In this sense the subtraction thesis presumes what it sets out to prove. Taylor obviously rejects this self-credentializing view and he wants us to consider the possibility that religious beliefs might still have merit. Indeed, it is an important premise of his argument that certain types of experience actually bear witness to this possibility. His book begins with an account from the autobiography of the Benedictine monk Bede Griffiths (1906–93) describing an early experience of religious epiphany:

A lark rose suddenly from the ground behind the tree where I was standing and poured out its song above my head, and then sank still singing to rest. Everything then grew still as the sunset faded and the veil of dusk began to cover the earth. I remember now the feeling of awe which came over me. I felt inclined to kneel on the ground, as though I had been standing in the presence of an angel; and I hardly dared to look on the face of the sky, because it seemed as through it was but a veil before the face of God.¹⁷

This is undeniably a beautiful passage, and Taylor is convinced that we have to tell the story secularization in such a way that it can account for the possibility of an experience which has this sort of grandeur and depth. More precisely, Taylor wants to remain faithful to the actual *phenomenology* of such an experience, the way it simply shows itself to be before we start trying to explain it away. But the subtractionist view just cannot account for such an epiphany on its own terms.

Taylor's own definition of the secular age is rather different. What most interests him about the shift to secularity is "a move from a society in which belief in God is unchallenged and indeed unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest

¹⁶ The objection is stated with greater clarity in Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, 41.

¹⁷ Quoted by Taylor from Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String* (London: Fount, 1979), 9.

to embrace.”¹⁸ Religion used to be a default but is now a choice. This definition bears some resemblance to the Weberian view insofar as Weber, too, believed that the process of modernization involved the breakdown of holistic belief systems and their replacement by plural value-spheres no one of which enjoyed a default or unquestioned legitimacy. But there is a crucial difference: Weber further believed that value-relativity was the *only* truth of things in the special sense that if one could tear away the subjective values imposed upon the world we would discover that the world in itself was meaningless. It is this implicitly metaphysical premise that Taylor refuses to accept. An operative assumption throughout the book is that those who deny religion are *missing* something, and that, even if they do not recognize it themselves, their lives are lacking in a certain fullness, an awareness of higher meaning or dimensionality. If there is a metaphysical premise to Taylor’s argument it is that religion cannot be explained (*pace* Weber) as merely a pre-modern and dispensable structure of social cohesion because it *actually does* put human beings in touch with something transcendent, though Taylor is also careful to note that those who do not consider themselves believers may deny their need for that transcendence at all:

The change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others. I may find it inconceivable that I would abandon my faith, but there are others, including possibly some very close to me, whose way of living I cannot in all honesty just dismiss as depraved, or blind, or unworthy, who have no faith (at least not in God, or the transcendent). Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieux, it may be hard to sustain one’s faith. There will be people who feel bound to give it up, even though they mourn its loss.¹⁹

On Taylor’s view, it is a defining feature of the modern condition that many different and at times mutually exclusive forms of life are now on offer such that no single one of them presents itself as the axiomatic or default way to live. Religious belief was once a social necessity, or, even more strongly put,

¹⁸ SA, 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

it was part of *what it was to be a human being*. Today, by contrast, religious belief is a social contingency.

While this is surely an important observation, it tells us very little about possible changes in the phenomenology of *belief itself*. If the typical modern believer (and perhaps Taylor himself) truly finds the possibility of *his own* disbelief “inconceivable,” then *that* belief is not optional at all. But then modern belief in *this* sense seems no *less* “axiomatic” than pre-modern belief. It is a pity that Taylor does not address this issue. One might have thought that the most typical religious sentiments amongst twenty-first-century moderns are *not* those they believe either entirely or not at all, but are rather those that leave them with a sense of muddle, such that they cannot fully inhabit their own convictions whatever they happen to be. Of course a considerable number of people are indeed strict theists or strict atheists, and Taylor has much to say about why the polarization of opinion between these two groups is a bad thing. But this makes it all the more surprising that his portrait of the modern condition does not leave room for the muddled majority. In North America, a great many people seem no longer at ease in the full-dress garments of religious commitment. But neither can they cast them aside. They sustain instead what might be called an “ironist’s faith,” the divided consciousness of simultaneously believing and not believing, and they are keenly aware that the beliefs they do hold are not merely an historical but also a psychological contingency.

In his earlier lectures, *Varieties of Religion Today*, Taylor characterized William James as the prototypical modern believer who felt himself always on the “cusp” between belief and disbelief.²⁰ But *A Secular Age* makes little room for irony of this sort. When Taylor observes that belief is now an “option” he does *not* mean that individual believers experience *their own faith* with a modernist’s vertiginous sense of contingency or value-relativity (an experience that in Peter Berger’s view makes “heretics” of us all, whatever our religious convictions).²¹ He means only that our social world is now sufficiently pluralistic about faith-commitments that as a society we no longer regard religion as providing us with the default normative foundations for all collective action. In its bare outlines this argument is not altogether new. It recalls the great *Annales* historian Lucien Febvre’s claim that “unbelief” in the pre-modern world was a virtual impossibility.²² But histo-

²⁰ *Varieties*, esp. 57–59.

²¹ Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1979).

²² Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l’incroyance au XVI siècle: la religion de Rabelais* (Paris: Michelet, 1947).

rians of the ancient world might also object that Taylor's before-and-after narrative overstates the necessitarian character of pre-modern religion. After all, even Augustine of Hippo in fifth-century North Africa (hardly a heretic) passed through various convictions and only came to Christianity after sincere experimentation with other frameworks of belief.²³ So what does Taylor mean by the claim that at some earlier point it was "virtually impossible not to believe in God"? Although his image of an integrated Christianity depends upon a certain conception of the medieval world, it should be obvious that his argument is *not* primarily historical, and those who raise objections concerning details of the historical record are missing its deeper import. For Taylor's is ultimately a philosophical argument about the *way* history conditions our beliefs. To appreciate the full force of its claims we need to delve more deeply into some of its philosophical premises.

THE IDEA OF A BACKGROUND

All beliefs, writes Taylor, "are held within a context or framework of the taken-for-granted, which usually remains tacit, and may even be as yet unacknowledged by the agent, because never formulated."²⁴ This notion of a framework of tacit belief is borrowed from phenomenologists (such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Hubert Dreyfus, and Taylor himself) who have contributed to current theories concerning what is termed the "background" of human understanding.²⁵ Heidegger described this as the *Umwelt* or "surrounding-world" of human action and he urged us to see that our very sense of ourselves as agents presupposes a shared context of significance. Our being-in-the-world is thus incorrigibly both social and practical (claims that derive from Heidegger's analyses of *Mitsein*, or being-with, and *Zuhandenheit*, the readiness-to-hand of publicly accessible tools). Because we are *invested* in the way things turn out for us in our lives our background also consists in a thick sediment of evaluations and social

²³ William H. Swatos, Jr. and Kevin J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept," *Sociology of Religion* 60 (1999): 209–28.

²⁴ SA, 13.

²⁵ See Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990); and Charles Taylor, "Merleau-Ponty and the Epistemological Picture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, eds. Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 26–49.

norms (hence Heidegger's famous claim that being-in-the-world is essentially a structure of "*Sorge*," or care). Now it is a vital lesson of existential phenomenology that most of these evaluations are not even formulated *as* beliefs. They just show up in the way we do things, the way we carry on in our daily affairs. For Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty and for Taylor too, practices *embody* beliefs and interpretations. It is this holistic network of practices that precedes and first makes possible both our consciousness of and our engagement with the world. We can, of course, make some number of these interpretations explicit, say, by focusing our attention upon them, or by subjecting them to rational scrutiny. But to do so we must rely upon further interpretations since a shared context of significance is a *precondition* for understanding at all.

The concept of a background has many important antecedents in the history of ideas. Taylor himself has noted elsewhere that the notion of a background was anticipated in Wittgenstein's arguments against private language and the scattered remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations* that meaning is always conditional upon a form of life.²⁶ But it remained to phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to show that the background of human understanding consists not primarily in concepts but in various modes of *embodied* intentionality, such as concrete social practices and publicly accessible language. On the phenomenologist's view, the liberal-atomist picture of the human being as isolable from her culture or history is not merely politically wrong-headed, it also presupposes a fantastical sort of independence that human beings can never hope to achieve. As Taylor explains: "We are in fact all acting, thinking, and feeling out of backgrounds and frameworks which we do not fully understand. To ascribe total personal responsibility to us for these is to want to leap out of the human condition."²⁷

Now a crucial premise of the phenomenological idea of a background is that it is given to us *historically*. A background is not fixed by God or reason, it is culturally and temporally finite, a shared but limited horizon of assumptions. But it is nonetheless authoritative within certain historical limits, and it determines what can show up as significant or what counts as possible for any given culture and epoch. Heidegger had this historical-ontological function in mind when he wrote that "metaphysics grounds an

²⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, eds., G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 241.

²⁷ SA, 387.

age.”²⁸ And Michel Foucault borrowed from phenomenology to develop his own theory of history as a series of broad-scale epochal shifts in discursive and social practices.²⁹

To understand Taylor's historical narrative it is important to see how deeply it remains indebted to yet also transforms the phenomenological idea of a background. The debt is most evident when we are introduced the notion of a “social imaginary,” which is defined as “that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.” A social imaginary is thus far more than a mere theory of the social world. It is rather the concatenation of tacit beliefs and expectations held not necessarily by philosophers but “ordinary people,” and it is articulated not in “theoretical terms” but instead through “images, stories, legends, etc.”³⁰ Taylor's point is that the story of secularization should not be told as primarily a shift in theories or doctrines (though he does think these theories matter a great deal). To be religious or secular is to live one's life in the company of other human beings within a fabric of social practices that embody a taken-for-granted “image” of our common world. And because religious beliefs are built into a whole network of social assumptions, the gradual shift from religious to secular society is accompanied by a large-scale shift in those very same social practices. The rise of secular consciousness in the modern West can be understood only within a much broader narrative concerning the socio-cultural and institutional transformation of our world and the social imaginary by which we picture it to ourselves.

HEGELIAN VARIATIONS ON A RELIGIOUS THEME

There is nothing modest about this ambition. The transformation of the social imaginary that Taylor wants to describe occurred very slowly over the span of nearly a millennium, beginning as early as the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, and even before that at the very dawn of the world religions in the period (*circa* 800–200 BCE) Karl Jaspers called the “Axial

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

²⁹ See Hubert Dreyfus, “On the Ordering of Things: Being and Power in Heidegger and Foucault,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 28 (supplement) (1989): 83–96; and Dreyfus, “Being and Power: Heidegger and Foucault,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 4 (1996): 1–16.

³⁰ SA, 171–72.

Age.”³¹ The shape of this story is broadly Hegelian, full of what Taylor calls “zig-zags” and ironies and unintended consequences.³² Not surprisingly, the monumental sweep of Taylor’s narrative requires that he place greater emphasis upon certain moments while eclipsing others or omitting them altogether. Because he is interested chiefly with the phenomenon of secularization in Western Europe, Taylor has virtually nothing to say about the complex and variegated history of Eastern Orthodoxy in all its national forms. Neither does he concern himself with the presence of minority religions in the West. The Jews (who have famously or sometimes notoriously figured in some historical narratives as the vanguard of social modernity) hardly appear at all. They serve only to inaugurate the ancient breakthrough to “monotheism” after which they remain more or less passive recipients of the changes wrought by their Christian neighbors.³³ Nor does Islam play a role of any significance, though one might argue that European history should include both *Al Andalus* (the Islamic civilization of the Iberian peninsula before the Catholic *Reconquista*) and the Ottoman Empire, the massive and polyglot Behemoth which reached at its zenith almost to the gates of Vienna. The civilization that interests Taylor is “Latin Christendom.” He acknowledges its internal differentiation but he seems to feel its metamorphosis can be told largely on its own terms and without reference to other peoples and civilizations either within or without. This monocultural emphasis distinguishes Taylor from both Durkheim and Weber, both of whom sustained a boldly comparativist perspective on the sociology of religion. The exclusive focus on Latin Christendom is not in itself objectionable, though it may tempt some readers to conclude that for Taylor the only genuine experience of the sacred is the experience of the Christian God (a problem I shall revisit later). It is nonetheless clear that Taylor is sympathetic to the ideal of an elastic Christian culture that remains open to its others and embraces multiform types of Christian religious commitment. In fact, it is one of his chief regrets that with the transformation of Western European Christianity over the past five hundred years much of its former elasticity has been lost.

The basic transformation of Western European Christianity as Taylor

³¹ See Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1949); and the sociological applications by Shmuel Eisenstadt, “The Axial Age: The Emergence of Transcendental Visions and the Rise of Clerics,” *European Journal of Sociology* 23, 2 (1982): 294–314; and Eisenstadt, ed., *The Origins and Diversity of the Axial Age of Civilizations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

³² SA, 95.

³³ SA, 771.

describes it begins more or less in the late-medieval and early-modern period (from approximately the tenth to fifteenth centuries), in a society of pluralistic and highly differentiated religious practice. This is an “enchanted world,” a world brimming over with spirits and demons, in which “moral forces” are felt to be embedded in the lived environment.³⁴ The metaphysical picture, supported by both Aristotle and popular belief, implies that religious meaning is not merely “in the mind” but is actually “out there.” An inhabitant of this universe can point to experiences confirming that even the most everyday objects are “charged” with supernatural power.³⁵ Because the environment is populated with forces that can penetrate one’s soul, whether by demonic possession or the Holy Spirit, one cannot experience one’s selfhood as ontologically distinct or walled-off from its surroundings. The self is instead “vulnerable” and “porous.”³⁶

In this religious cosmos God and society are intertwined. From the local parish to the universal Church one feels oneself to be embedded within a complex web of personal, economic, and politico-ecclesiastical arrangements all of which conspire to reinforce the sense that society itself is the locus of divine power. The social bond is sacred. But these arrangements exhibit tremendous variation. The celibate clergy “prays and fulfills priestly and pastoral functions for a married laity, which in turn supports the clergy. On a broader scale, monks pray for all, mendicant orders preach; others provide alms, hospitals, etc. Over time, the tension is overlaid with an equilibrium, based on a complementarity of functions.”³⁷

For Taylor the millennium-long emergence of the secular world over the past millennium has involved the gradual breakdown of this integrated religious society and the rise of a new social imaginary in which human beings no longer conceive of themselves as necessarily embedded within a holistic network of institutions and belief. This transformation was manifold and its preparation required hundreds of years. An important step was the emphasis on discipline and uniformity of religious practice, signaled early on by the decision of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 that imposed a universal requirement of auricular confession upon the entire laity. Along with this came greater rigor in the training of priests and the proliferation of teaching manuals for clerical instruction, all efforts which typified the drive toward orthopraxis that culminated in the age of Reform. The

³⁴ SA, 31–32.

³⁵ SA, 35.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ SA, 44.

irony is that this greater intensity of religious devotion proved to be an important step toward the dissolution of traditional religion: by imposing new and more homogenous modes of belief the Church weakened the older structures of social complementarity and helped lay the foundations for a modern and more undifferentiated society in which social and sacred bonds no longer functioned in concert. By the time of the Reformation it was possible to conceive a robust distinction between one's commitments to society and to God.

The creation of a "disciplinary society" was a complex and ramified process without a single causal origin. But the reader may be forgiven for thinking that at times Taylor betrays a certain Catholic-minded resentment toward the innovations of Protestant culture: Calvin and Locke receive stern treatment, and at various points in the book the term "Reform" seems to swell in meaning until it embraces all the misfortunes of early modern Europe. But this would be to misunderstand Taylor's transconfessional thesis. He is careful to note that the very same patterns of reformist discipline emerged in Catholic lands as well. The neo-Stoic writer Justus Lipsius, for example, laid down theories of professional statecraft and self-control that would inspire notables of every faith, Calvinist, Lutheran, and Catholic. Nor was the transformation merely social; it also drew justification from the innermost resources of Christian theology. A crucial step was the debate between realists and nominalists concerning God Himself: the medieval conception of God was joined to an Aristotelian-realist doctrine concerning the perfections inherent in all things. Occam chafed at this realist view because it implied that God was constrained to will only what was by nature good. A truly sovereign God should have the capacity to determine what was good through His own will. Henceforth there could be no intrinsic kinds independent of His calling them into being. Occam meant to magnify God, but again Taylor detects an ironic consequence: the victory of nominalism over realism introduced a bold metaphysical distinction between an unconditioned agency and an undifferentiated cosmos linked only by instrumental reason. Theology itself therefore played an important role in the disenchantment of nature and by so doing widened the chasm between religion and everyday life.

With the rise of the disciplinary society Taylor also sees a change in the very conception of human being. The older conception of the self as embedded in a holistic but differentiated natural-social-theological order slowly gave way to a "disembedded" selfhood understood to be ontologically prior to and independent of its surroundings. The realist conception of the

world as the bearer of intrinsic meanings to which we must conform was supplanted by the notion that the only orders we must acknowledge are those we construct for ourselves.³⁸ The social imaginary no longer envisioned an interdependent system working in concert but a dispersal of atomistic individuals responsible only to themselves and only contingently responsive to those around them. This new model of the human being came to be shared across wide spectrum of early modern philosophers (notably, Descartes, Locke, and Kant) and eventually solidified in what Taylor calls the “buffered self.” The buffered self is assertive, rationalistic and stakes a claim to autarky that shuts down its experience of intimacy even in relation to its own bodily passions (a point Taylor drives home with copious quotation from Norbert Elias’s history of manners).

In describing this more isolated and self-possessed model of human being Taylor does not want to deny the gains it has brought: “A sense of power, of capacity, of being able to order our world and ourselves.” Insofar as it is a self-conception connected with “reason and science” its rise was accompanied by “great gains in knowledge and understanding.” But it has also encouraged a somewhat less palatable feeling of “invulnerability”:

Living in a disenchanted world, the buffered self is no longer open, vulnerable to a world of spirits and forces which cross the boundary of the mind, indeed, negate the very idea of there being a secure boundary. The fears, anxieties, even terrors that belong to the porous self are behind it. This sense of self-possession, of a secure inner mental realm, is all the stronger, if in addition to disenchanting the world, we have also taken the anthropocentric turn and no longer even draw upon the power of God.³⁹

For the first time the very idea of one’s dependence upon a transcendent or non-human order came to seem potentially dispensable. The way was now clear for the appearance of an “exclusive humanism” that no longer felt the urgency of an appeal to transcendence. The secular age was born.

THE IMMANENT FRAME

Much of the remainder of Taylor’s book—approximately half of its nearly 800 pages of text—consists in a critical description of the secular world as

³⁸ SA, 127.

³⁹ SA, 301.

we experience it today in modern (Western) Europe and North America. But here the argument begins to exhibit a host of complications. The breakdown of the holistic yet differentiated pre-modern religious society did not necessarily mean that everyone sloughed off their faith to become buffered or atomistic selves. Instead, when the single framework began to unravel we witnessed what Taylor calls the “nova effect.” The possible strands of religious and non-religious satisfaction multiplied and trailed off in dozens of rival directions. Part of what gave rise to this multiplicity was the simple fact that no *one* answer any longer seemed inevitable. More dramatic still, the social imaginary no longer supported the earlier experience of a unified and sacred cosmos. The background or taken-for-granted interpretation that now structures our lives is remarkably different from what it was in the pre-modern world. Whatever our religious convictions, we have all tacitly consented to the disenchantment-narrative according to which there has been a rupture between God and nature. From this modern perspective it is at least *possible* to describe the cosmos in wholly immanent terms and without reference to a non-human or transcendent source of meaning. In this sense we all live today with a default interpretation of the world that Taylor calls “the immanent frame.” His summary of this experience sounds ominous indeed:

It is the sense of an absence; it is the sense that all order, all meaning comes from us. We encounter no echo outside. In the world read this way, as so many of our contemporaries live it, the natural/supernatural distinction is no mere intellectual abstraction. A race of humans has arisen which has managed to experience its world entirely as immanent. In some respects we may judge this achievement a victory for darkness, but it is a remarkable achievement nonetheless.⁴⁰

It is no small irony that this passage seems so reminiscent of Nietzsche, who warned of a coming race of stunted humans he called “the last men.” The difference is that Taylor’s last men are creatures of pure immanence, and the world they inhabit is the *unjoyful* world in which God may be dead and meaning comes only from us. Whether this is a fair sketch of the modern condition is a question I will return to momentarily. For now let us accept Taylor’s suggestion that the immanent frame is haunted by the feeling of the transcendence it has rejected. It leaves behind a trace of malaise, the

⁴⁰ SA, 376.

sense that something is missing even if one is not entirely sure what that something is.

What solace is there for our current discontent? Some believers have tried to carry on with their traditions as if nothing had happened. But the very fact that there now exists a variety of denominations often injects religious traditionalism with a strain of militancy. Already in the nineteenth century, conservatives began to articulate a “neo-Durkheimian” or functionalist interpretation of religion as something considered absolutely necessary for obedience and social peace. Characteristically, Taylor’s tone becomes most lacerating only when he describes people who embrace this combination of religion and political reaction. But these were only few amongst the wide range of options available today. A growing number of people, more plentiful, perhaps, in Europe than in North America, have seized upon the option of exclusive humanism. And on Taylor’s view such people often articulate a longing for transcendence difficult to accommodate within the confines of an exclusively humanist perspective. Romantics complement the immanent frame by finding some analogue of transcendence in the sublimity of nature. Others look to the “subtler” languages of art and music. Perhaps most powerful of all in the modern world are forms of nationalism that Taylor calls “lesser modes” or “substitutes for eternity”: “One can make the eternal be the clan, the tribe, the society, the way of life.”⁴¹ Whatever the recourse, the very fact that one is seeking a *kind* of eternity bears witness to our modern sense that something has been lost, a feeling that on Taylor’s view seems to accompany the immanent frame like a shadow. The problem with all these solutions in Taylor’s opinion is that they offer merely an *ersatz* transcendence: “the mystery, the depth, the profoundly moving, can be, for all we know, entirely anthropological. Atheists, humanists cling on to this, as they go to concerts, operas, read great literature. So one can complement an ethics and a scientific anthropology which remain very reductive and flat.”⁴² Taylor is being quite candid when he describes any recourse as a “substitute.” His conclusion seems to be that such a recourse can never be entirely successful since the sought-after transcendence is not actually God.

But there is an alternative. Taylor is convinced that notwithstanding the strength of the immanent frame it remains possible to hold ourselves open to authentic transcendence. Faith of a genuine sort, not a substitutive faith or a New Age religion of human potential, remains a very real option:

⁴¹ SA, 721.

⁴² SA, 356.

The immanent order can thus slough off the transcendent. But it doesn't necessarily do so. What I have been describing as the immanent frame is common to all of us in the modern West, or at least that is what I am trying to portray. Some of us want to live it as open to something beyond; some live it as closed. It is something which permits closure, without demanding it.⁴³

This seems a surprising conclusion especially when it appears at the very end of an historical narrative whose chief purpose was to convince us that the whole societal infrastructure of traditional religious life has irrevocably collapsed. To appreciate the force of Taylor's alternative it is therefore important to understand what he is not saying. He is not saying that *everyone* will remain open to transcendence, nor does he imagine that all of us will feel it to be necessary. He recognizes that many will simply deny anything has been lost. Others will insist that the experience of purely human flourishing is more than sufficient. Bolder exponents of exclusive humanism (such as Nietzsche) will rebel *against* the call for transcendence, which they will disparage as a symptom of our fear at the fact our own finitude and vulnerability.⁴⁴ Exclusive humanists of this variety may try to salvage a non-religious experience of "*internal transcendence*" (as Martha Nussbaum proposes). Taylor finds this perspective worth consideration but he thinks it has closed itself off from an experience of the beyond. While humanists may dismiss religious believers as "closed-minded," Taylor (with rhetorical aplomb) turns the complaint against them:

Exclusive humanism closes the transcendent window, as though there were nothing beyond. More, as though it weren't an irrepressible need of the human heart to open that window, and first look, then go beyond. As though feeling this need were the result of a mistake, an erroneous world-view, bad conditioning, or worse, some pathology.⁴⁵

Furthermore, Taylor warns, exclusive humanists are standing on a slippery slope: "From the religious perspective," he writes, "the problem is the opposite." Transcendence is not an expression of hatred at the world or an evasion of all-too-human flourishing. Rather, even granting its sometimes

⁴³ SA, 544.

⁴⁴ SA, 625–27.

⁴⁵ SA, 638.

benevolent intentions, the *denial* of transcendence is “bound to lead to a crumbling and eventual breakdown of all moral standards. First, secular humanism, and then eventually its pieties and values come under challenge. And in the end nihilism.”⁴⁶ If one denies transcendence the result will be anti-humanist excrescences such as Fascism or Bolshevism, symptoms of a fascination with violence unchecked by any moral ends. Hence the apparent stalemate: “Two radically different perspectives on the human condition. Who is right?”⁴⁷ Here is Taylor’s answer:

Well, who can make more sense of the life all of us are living? Seen from this angle, the very existence of modern anti-humanism seems to tell against exclusive humanism. If the transcendental view is right, then human beings have an ineradicable bent to respond to something beyond life. Denying this stifles.⁴⁸

Because exclusive humanists cannot appeal to something beyond the simple ideal of human flourishing, they have little defense against anti-humanists who therefore represent the cruel culmination of the exclusive-humanist perspective. And even when anti-humanism is not an imminent danger the human longing for transcendence of the human is a *fact*, and it is one that all of us who live in the immanent frame should not deny.

But this is hardly a knockdown argument. Part of the problem is Taylor’s failure to acknowledge rival accounts of political “anti-humanism.” While some may agree that Fascism and Bolshevism represented an irreligious denial of transcendence, others have discerned in these movements a modernist spirit of “political theology.”⁴⁹ On this latter view, the celebration of the people or the collective takes on a sacral character *not* because genuine religion has been abandoned but only because its energies remain so powerfully *alive*. But if this interpretation is correct, the anti-humanist

⁴⁶ SA, 638.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Eric Voegelin in *The Political Religions* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1986; 1st German ed. 1938); and Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), esp. xviii. More recently see Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Knopf, 2007). On Nazism as a political religion see Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Volume I: The Years of Persecution* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), esp. 72, and the concluding pages of *Volume II: The Years of Extermination* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

threat comes not from an intensified tradition of humanist self-assertion but from the tradition of religion itself.

A second problem is that Taylor seems not to recognize that “exclusive humanism” may sometimes nourish not the arrogance of Nietzschean self-assertion but rather a deepened sense of human vulnerability. Taylor supposes that when religious conceptions of the self yield to purely naturalistic ones we are on our way toward an unreflective hedonism or cults of bodily power. This is the premise behind his account of the rise of the “buffered self.” But an important counter-narrative would suggest that the loss of the soul awakened human beings to a richer sense of their own animal fragility. To conceive of oneself as a purely material being of flesh and bone is to understand oneself as more porous to one’s surroundings, not less so, since one is metaphysically of the same substance as the world. A soul, no matter how penetrable to spirits and demons, would seem to proffer a kind of refuge from sickness and death that a physical body cannot. Naturalism has its own humility.

One reason Taylor may not appreciate this possibility as deeply as he should has to do with the character of his own philosophical commitments. As a philosopher indebted to both existential phenomenology and hermeneutics Taylor has spent much of his career combating the errors of the dominant post-Cartesian epistemological tradition. Now one of the major flaws of that tradition in Taylor’s view it is that it conceives of the self as a disengaged agency: this self is understood as primarily mentalistic (e.g., Descartes’s *cogito* or Kant’s *transcendental apperception*) and its disengagement is such that it can take up a distanced and rational stance towards its own history, its emotions, even its own body. Taylor has spent much energy contesting the manifold distortions that attend this model. In *Sources of the Self* it appeared as Locke’s “punctual self,” and the “buffered” self that figures so prominently in *A Secular Age* is a variant of this idea, though here we are told far more about its unfortunate socio-historical consequences.⁵⁰

Now one might agree that the disengagement-model continues to operate as a kind of prejudice within some spheres of contemporary philosophy. And one would be right to combat it in the just the way Taylor has. But here is the confusion: according to phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty whose perspectives Taylor has worked to defend, the disengagement-model should be rejected for the simple reason that it is

⁵⁰ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, see especially ch. 9, 159–76.

wrong. *It simply doesn't capture what it is like to be a human being.* What is therefore so perplexing about *A Secular Age* is that Taylor seems to describe the disengagement-model as if it were the *actual* experience of modern selfhood when it is arguably only a prejudicial and inaccurate model common to a certain class of philosophers. This difficulty is not Taylor's alone. It afflicts many historians of philosophy, from Hegel to Heidegger, who interweave philosophical and socio-political narration as if reigning philosophical doctrines were also reliable markers for everyday life.

When one reflects upon the actual experience of modern selfhood as it has arisen in the wake of traditional religion one might wonder how the philosophical prejudice of the buffered self could ever have taken hold. Consider, for example, the comments from Freud's 1925 essay, "The Resistances to Psychoanalysis."⁵¹ Freud tells us that one of the challenges confronting us as moderns is that we have been compelled to surrender the feeling of infantile security that was commonplace for our pre-modern ancestors. The breakdown of this feeling was due to what Freud calls the three successive "blows to human dignity." The Copernican revolution dislodged us from our central station in a divinely ordered cosmos. The Darwinian revolution uprooted us from our privileged seats as chosen by God for dominion over His creation. And the psychoanalytic revolution upended our last vestiges of self-confidence with the suggestion that we do not even enjoy sovereign control over our own thoughts. Freud concluded that if his theory met with violent resistance this was partly because it was the culminating step in modernity's assault on our erstwhile feelings of divine protection and entitlement. Now one needn't think that Freud was necessarily right about psychoanalysis in particular. But his historical summary of the deepened experience of humiliation and decentering that accompanied the loss of axiomatic religion may offer an important corrective to Taylor's claim that this loss only inflated our feelings of self-possession. Taylor seems to think that traditional theism was the sole bulwark against human self-aggrandizement. But is it truly inconceivable that with the rise of thoroughgoing naturalism one might find oneself moved to a keener modesty or even something like gratitude for what nature itself has given? At the very least, it seems, Taylor's image of a potentially invulnerable self tells only part of the story.⁵²

⁵¹ Sigmund Freud, "Die Widerstände Gegen die Psychoanalyse," *Imago* 11 (1925): 222–33.

⁵² Consider, for instance, Michael Sandel's recent effort to defend an ethic of "giftedness," without necessarily appealing to a divine "giver" who is the source of nature's unexpected

THE POSSIBILITY OF TRANSCENDENCE

Perhaps the greatest perplexity of Taylor's book is its bold-yet-paradoxical conviction that even within the immanent frame some of us will nonetheless manage to remain open to an experience of genuinely religious transcendence. What is surprising about this idea is that it seems to conflict with Taylor's own description of what it is like to be modern: if to be modern is to live within an immanent frame then how would a transcendent God show up at all? The difficulty here derives from the concept of a background itself, according to which our very experience of what there is was said to be premised upon a shared framework of tacit or taken-for-granted beliefs. The background is what gives us our ontology. And Taylor's narrative was meant to demonstrate that the background changed over time: the background of traditional society permitted God to show up in a complicated way as both transcendent to our world yet also immanent within it. For the Christian God was "out there" yet also "in here," both Father and Son; both celestial and embodied in a manifold of social practices and institutions from the Holy See to the parish priest. Thanks to the background our pre-modern ancestors felt their social bonds to be charged with sacred meaning. But on Taylor's account the background understanding of the modern world is different, since it is one that tells us that what there is will show up as immanent. How, then, does a modern ontology of immanence permit transcendence to shine through?

Taylor's way around this seeming paradox is to relax the ontological primacy of the background. The immanent order "can slough off the transcendent" although "*it doesn't necessarily do so.*"⁵³ He grants that the immanent frame is "common to all of us in the modern West." But he insists the immanent frame can be *spun* in different ways: it is "something which *permits closure, without demanding it*" (my emphasis in both sentences).

This stipulation is rather surprising since it suggests that transcendence is a transhistorical constant, an experience which is still accessible (at least for some of us) notwithstanding the flattening-out of our social imaginary. But it is hard to see why this would be so. For it is a basic premise of Taylor's historical narrative that the background has changed over time. And a transformation in the background means a transformation in the sorts of entities that can show up. But one implication is that such a trans-

gifts, in *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁵³ SA, 544.

formation should also change *us*. And, indeed, Taylor thinks it *has* changed us in profound (and sometimes unfortunate) ways. The point of his narrative is to show us how much the place of religion has been relativized into a mere option thanks to the many-sided transformation of our social existence. But he will not let this narrative change us entirely: he urges us to see that “human beings have an ineradicable bent to respond to something beyond life.” But if this bent is truly *ineradicable* then the historical transformation of the background seems much less profound in its consequences than Taylor himself implies. History may have changed many things; the longing for transcendence persists.

And what of the Transcendent *itself*? If we are to take seriously Taylor’s premise that a change in the background has brought forth new and unprecedented options for human life, including the life of faith, then we should also consider the possibility that the great transformation from the pre-modern religious world to our own world of immanent modernity may also have changed our conception of the sacred itself. Taylor seems to admit this possibility throughout his book, but only when he wants to explain how the sacred can be *misunderstood* (by Calvinists, Jansenists, Deists, nineteenth-century nationalists, and so forth, all of whom he sees as abandoning certain vital features that should ideally accompany a satisfying religious life). For Taylor, the sacred is historically invariant, *always and only* God. Other experiences (for example, a Romantic’s experience of the natural sublime, or a concertgoer’s experience of a Beethoven symphony) do not count in his view as *actual* transcendence since they are ultimately reducible to an exclusive humanism. But this is to pre-decide which are to be valid candidates for sacred experience.

The problem is that the basic distinction—between transcendence and immanence—is freighted with a great number of metaphysical prejudices that may obstruct us from recognizing other ways to experience the sacred in the modern world. What room, for example, can be made here for Spinoza’s conception of the divine as wholly immanent to nature (*Deus sive Natura*)? For Taylor Spinoza belongs squarely within the tradition of Deism, whose “impersonal” image of God laid the grounding for the modern natural-scientific image of nature as an unresponsive and disenchanting causal order.⁵⁴ Lost in this characterization is the possibility that the sacred might actually show up *within a framework of thoroughgoing immanence*. Spinoza, said Novalis, was “*der Gottvertrunkene Mann*” (the God-intoxicated

⁵⁴ SA, 280–81.

man). For Taylor, however, the possibility of a wholly immanent pantheism was left behind long ago and can no longer hold a coherent place in our lives. But perhaps this is only because his own metaphysical constraints compel him to disregard any such cases that conflict with his *a priori* conviction that the title of the sacred belongs to monotheistic transcendence alone.

And what of aesthetics? Taylor grants that many moderns will seek out something *like* the sacred by opening themselves to great works of art. But he is reluctant to admit that such examples could count as genuine transcendence, since an experience of aesthetic transfiguration, no matter how profound, does not require our surpassing the natural-human matrix. The wonder we feel might well be nothing but another form of immanence: the thrill of sensory fulfillment, an admiration at the artist's technique, and so forth. Taylor grants some exceptions. But it is revealing that when he acknowledges those rare cases of modern music and literature that permit feelings of genuine transcendence he names only artists known for their religious inspiration, e.g., the French Catholic modernist composer Olivier Messiaen, and the poet T. S. Eliot, a convert to Anglicanism.⁵⁵ Taylor also mentions Beethoven, but his example is the *Missa Solemnis*, which borrows its structures from the Latin Mass. Apparently, Taylor wants his transcendence in traditionally religious form. Cases of "absolute music," that is, musical compositions without a program or object, such as Beethoven's late string quartets, are consigned to the story of "disembedding."⁵⁶

One reason to resist this verdict is that it seems unresponsive to the actual phenomenology of aesthetic experience. What does it mean when a modern-but-non-religious person claims to be "moved" by a work of art? Taylor admits it *might* be a moment of transcendence (though this would seem to depend in part on the religious affiliation of the artist). But the experience *itself* provides no guarantee of this meaning. What is confusing here is that to find out whether the experience counts as transcendence or not, it is apparently necessary to go beyond the experience itself (a violation of phenomenological method). Or does Taylor believe that Bede Griffiths's epiphany somehow *feels* more transcendent than my own epiphany before a Cézanne? Both are experiences of great plenitude and beauty. But why does the first seem to count as necessarily transcendent while the other does not? It is tempting to ask whether this closing down of other possibilities is compatible with the openness Taylor himself recommends.

⁵⁵ SA, 360.

⁵⁶ SA, 355–56.

What I am trying to suggest is that Taylor's richly-textured history of the background should also have awakened him to the (possibly distressing) thought that there are many modes of the sacred and many kinds of wonder, and that the Christian religion is merely *one* historical deposit of sacred experience amongst many. It is neither the first nor does it seem likely that it will be the last. Admittedly, the notion that our experience of the sacred could be historically *variable* may seem paradoxical. Yet once we have committed ourselves to a full-blown historical ontology it follows as a matter of course: the character of the sacred must change as the background changes, and from this iron rule nothing can claim exemption—not even God. It is this principle that makes historical ontology especially worrisome to a conventional monotheist, whether Christian, Muslim, or Jew: for several millennia many people in the West have subscribed to traditions according to which the sacred shows itself as some kind of transcendent mega-entity, a super-subject or Presence. (Heidegger termed these traditions “onto-theological.”) But that does not mean that this is what sacred experience must always be like. Indeed, we might consider whether this version of sacred experience already represents a certain breakdown in the holistic experience of sacred life. Perhaps the “onto-theological” experience of sacred transcendence is a symptom of disenchantment, not a refuge from it.

The French social theorist Marcel Gauchet has tried to integrate this historicist insight into his own political history of religion.⁵⁷ His project represents an unusual combination of Durkheim and Weber: a functionalist conception of religion as the sacral bond of society volatilized by an historical narrative that seeks to explain how that bond mutated into the modern ideal of political freedom. This inquiry brings him to the striking conclusion that the rise of monotheism was itself the very first phase in the *decay* of religion. In the immanent religions of primitive societies, the instituting power of society was fully removed from human control, thus imposing a form of static equality on the collective. Paradoxically, this radical dispossession began to collapse when the monotheistic revolutions of the Axial age broke free of this immanence to imagine a divinity transcendent to the world. Intersecting with new dynamics created by the birth of states, the rise of transcendence fueled what Gauchet calls the “religious exit from religion,” since it was the initial step by which humanity desacralized its understanding of its own social and terrestrial condition and gained greater

⁵⁷ On Gauchet's place in postwar French social thought see Warren Breckman, “Democracy Between Disenchantment and Political Theology: French Post-Marxism and the Return of Religion,” *New German Critique* 94 (2005): 72–105.

freedom over its fate. Now, if Gauchet is right, then Christianity (and monotheism more generally) is not the eternal form of religion at all, and *transcendence itself is but one phase in the social history of the sacred*. As Simone Weil suggested, the highest form of prayer might not even require an object.⁵⁸

Understandably, Taylor does not wish to take this last step into the turbulent waters of ontological historicism.⁵⁹ Notwithstanding all of the changes history has wrought Taylor seems determined to leave the very object of transcendence intact. For what is genuinely sacred for Taylor can only be transcendent and can only be God. Anything else, he suggests would be “like Hamlet without the Prince.”⁶⁰ At various points in *A Secular Age* there are signs that he would like to adopt a more generous and genuinely pluralistic perspective on the varieties of sacred experience. But it is ultimately a non-historicist and non-pluralist model of the sacred that serves as the polestar for Taylor’s narrative. And it not difficult to see why: to historicize the sacred would be to relativize God as merely one *manifestation* of the sacred in history. Worse still, it would subordinate Him to time. Taylor would readily grant that God has a metaphysical history, since a divine narrative is a characteristic of monotheism in general and of Christianity in particular. But he appears to resist an ontological historicization that would rob the divine of its singularity as the sole object of authentic transcendence. This resistance, one could say, marks the limit-point of a pluralistic historical ontology, beyond which a traditional monotheist cannot pass if he wishes to retain his faith. Taylor holds instead to the hard nugget of conviction that God is *still there*, and that He is still what He has always been, even if His appearance is now, perhaps, more rare and more miraculous. The striking conclusion of this brilliant yet perplexing history is that when it comes to the most ultimate matters history may not matter at all.

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⁵⁸ Simone Weil, “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God,” in *Waiting for God* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 56.

⁵⁹ A clear sign of this reluctance is Taylor’s foreword to Gauchet’s book, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burges (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁶⁰ Taylor, foreword to Gauchet, *Disenchantment*, xv.



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- Bembo, Pietro. *History of Venice*. Vol. 2. Books V–VIII. Ed. and trans. Robert W. Ulery, Jr. I Tatti Renaissance Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2008. xi, 407p., bibl., index, \$29.95. Second of three volumes covering 1499–1509 in facing-page translation.
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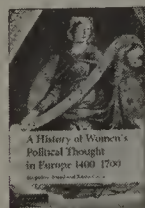
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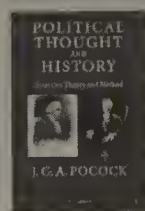
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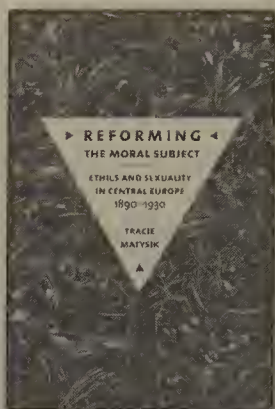
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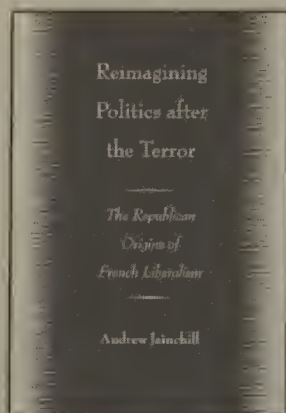
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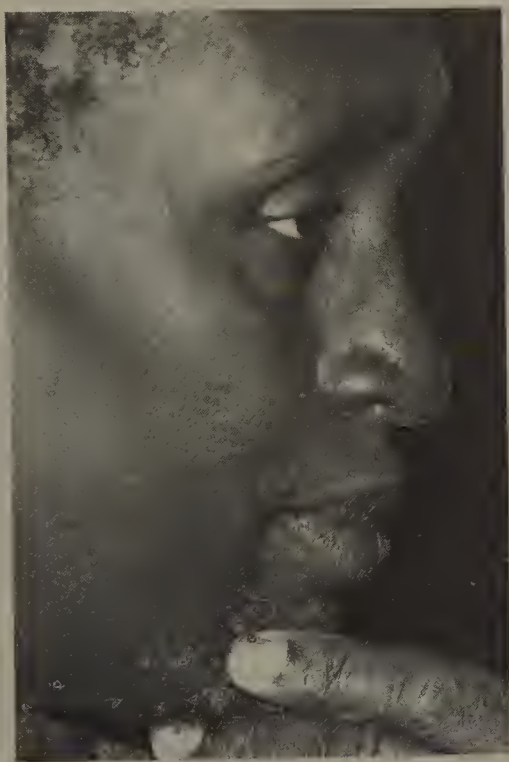


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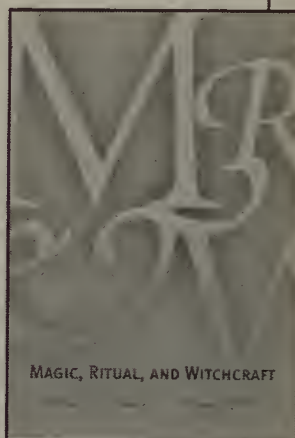
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